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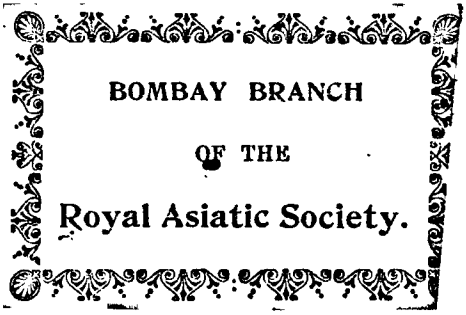

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CINDERS

CINDERS

A NOVEL

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BY

HELEN MATHERS

AUTHOR OF "COMIN' THRO' THE RYE," "BECKY," "BAM WILDFIRE," ETC.

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Cinders

CHAPTER I

"She that is wise, her time will prize;
She that will eat her breakfast in her bed,
And spend all the morning in dressing of her head,
And sit at dinner like a maiden bride,
God in His mercy may do much to save her,
But what a case is he in that must have her!"

"THERE'S hardly a smart man to be seen in Bond Street," grumbled Celia, "and *he* is racing to the War Office, or buying himself a sleeping-bag, and hasn't time to stop and speak to you."

"His proud foot spurning the ground," murmured Cinders. "Wasn't there an outcry that our men were in danger of becoming effete? Anyway they have turned their backs on their ladies' bowers with hearty goodwill! They all seem delighted to get away from us! I wonder if they put over their camps what the Americans do over their clubs—

'Where the women cease from troubling,
And the wicked are at rest.'"

"But the women don't cease," said Celia; "all those who are really in the movement have gone out after the smart men, on philanthropic grounds, of course. They simply *had* to go, or die of dulness in the desert. If Phryne and Laïs lived nowadays, they would devote one half of their time to pleasure, and the other to hospitals. Also they would study nursing as a fine art. '*And if one comes to dance, what matters a veil?*'"

Cinders frowned, drawing together those slender, flexible brows to which she owed half the character, and most of the charm of her face.

"I *hate* war," she said. "To Carlyle it was admirable, because it was 'the pursuit in which a man with the cold and brutal strain of domination he called heroism, could most absolutely prove his absolute contempt of human agony,' but the gentle Ruskin declared it to be the foundation of all the high virtues and faculties of men."

Celia yawned.

"How funny you are with your old classics," she said; "how you find time to read so much, *I* don't know."

"Of course you don't," said Cinders. "I always say that a real beauty is the most hard-worked woman on earth. What with her baths and massage, her manicurist, hairdresser, calisthenics, necessary exercise, dressmaker, milliner, bootmaker, and the worry of running half-a-dozen lovers at one and the same time, she is

simply driven to death. It's a delightful rest to be ordinary—like me!"

"But there is next to no one to dress for now," objected Celia, whose beauty consisted of perfect harmony of features—nothing especially fine in any one of them—but such complete harmony as Nature produces even in humans when given a fair chance, and left to work out her effects unmolested by wrong conditions of their parents' minds and bodies. "And it's economical—very. Not but that taste is a splendid corrective to extravagance: often you will ransack town and not find a thing you can put on without looking like a hundred other merry-andrews! Andrew! that reminds me."

"Had you forgotten him?" said Cinders, with some sarcasm.

"No," said Celia, walking to the window, and looking out on the City of Dreadful Snow now darkening towards night.

"I wonder when he sails?" And she frowned, for Andrew could have stayed if he had liked. And that he had not placed her before duty, and that fierce love of adventure which in nine cases out of ten beats love out of the field in a real man's heart, made her furious. She had rather enjoyed the sensation of being swept away by rapids, instead of rocking gently with painted figures on a painted ocean, and as Andrew was about the only person she knew who had ever seemed likely to take her off her feet, naturally she

would miss the excitement and danger of the affair when he departed.

"Fool," she said aloud, and angrily.

"You want a *coward* for a lover?" cried Cinders, with fiery eyes, "a man who is studying tailors' patterns while others are reading the book of life?"

"I want a man who'll put *me* first," said Celia sharply. "Not that I mean to marry Andrew; his position is not especially good, and a woman nowadays is ranged in society by her lover—not her husband." (Cinders coloured and moved her head, as if brushing aside some nasty insect.) "I've been a widow long enough to sample the full beauty of changing my lovers as often as I change my frock, instead of putting up with the humours of *one* man who has ceased to be interesting! One can't study the *menu* with as much interest before dinner as after, and all men are liars in love, and one man is very like another—the lover becomes quite as boorish as the husband before long!"

"Did Schilizzi?" inquired Cinders.

"If quite certain," went on Celia calmly, "that he will always be courteous, ardent, and on his best behaviour, one might risk it; but how can one be certain? I wouldn't bet even on Andrew. Marriage for a man is like a table-cloth that is never changed—he has to sit down with it every day, and very quickly he revolts; he wants a fresh serviette, a new table-cloth at each meal, and he usually gets it. The woman who

deliberately throws away the one man she loves by going to the altar with him, simply deserves all she gets, and that's bad enough! She sits at home while he goes out to see 'the other woman.' Look round at the charmers who keep men's devotion all their lives—even have delightful men to walk beside their bath-chairs when they are decrepid—how do they keep them? The moment a man finds himself in a ring-fence, his one aim in life is to break through it! To keep a man, a woman

> 'Must be chaste as proud Diana was,
> Yet warm as Venus,
> As wise as Phryne in the arts of love,
> Good as the best, and tempting as the worst—
> A saint, a sinner, and a paradox.'"

Cinders frowned and exclaimed, "You should never try to be witty; you are only horrid, and it's the sort of thing Andrew hates. And he is the only real *man* I've ever seen out of your lovers. I'd try and please him. Why not assume a passion though you have it not? I'm told men like it."

"I have no idea of giving myself away!" said Celia scornfully.

"Poor soul!" exclaimed Cinders pityingly. "Give away even if it be only rags—but *give!* If it's only sweetstuff to a child—sympathy to a drowning soul—give! And Andrew is much too good for you. It makes me sick to see a man with a face like that so completely the slave of his senses."

And indeed, the whole type of Andrew Mackenzie, his order of intellect, his position and record, stood so high, that he had a right to demand the very best the world had in womanhood, yet the strong-brained, clear-headed man was swathed in the frills of a doll like Celia, and he yielded himself to his bondage with such zest and thoroughness!

"Don't you think you are rather indecent?" said Celia. "You sit down, and calmly pull first one thing out of your own, or some other person's mind, then another—examine, discuss it, then return it, or pigeon-hole it again—you have no reticence whatever."

The girl stared, for this was news indeed. *She* knew that there were three Cinders: the one that she showed to the world (that was the disappointing one), the one she never let see daylight, and the one that she meant to be in the long run, if temperament and chance were not too strong for her.

"But imaginative people never see things as they really are," went on Celia, her white figure standing out against the vivid rose-red of the walls, the blackness of the woodwork, and the oak chair in which she sat, a dining-room specially planned to show her up to the best advantage, for there was nothing in it that was not black, or white, or red. Three giant camellia trees in full flower—two white, the other red—stood in great Tezzan jars at long distances, other flowers there were none; and to Celia, the only inartistic thing there was her dark-robed critic, who sat on the rug staring into

the fire, and who did not make a temple of her body, worshipping thereat with incessant rites, as Celia did. Life to Mrs. Schilizzi was one long labour of love to give a fleeting feeling of pleasure to a man, of jealousy to one of her own sex, and she had a real contempt for a girl who put mind before her personal appearance, and the pleasures of intellect before those of admiration, excitement, and the material pleasures of life.

On the other hand, Cinders felt for Celia the genuine pity that an unselfish person feels for a selfish one—how much can a human body hold of self-worship? So much and no more; while the love that flows outwards from a human heart can flood with sunshine all the little world in which it dwells. And she sometimes thought that if Celia's little starved soul almost washed out by the excessive fad of cleanliness, of much cultivation of its husk, had been outside instead of in, it would not have been left even a chance of existence.

"'Oh, what is a handmaid,
And what is a queen?
All lie down together
Where the grass is green.
The foulest face hidden,
The fairest not seen,
Gone as if never
They had breathed nor been,'".

she murmured softly, her gaze still fixed on the burning coals.

It often annoyed Celia to find a curious sequence

between her own thoughts and Cinders' speech, the latter being by no means flattering to the former.

"Yet, after all," went on the girl with delightful impertinence, "intellect outlasts colouring, and shall bring a man peace at the last. People may hate me, but they *never* get tired of me. I'm like my beloved Tommy Atkins—by no means always good; that's his charm—I mean mine."

Celia glanced from the whiteness of the slim hands stretched out on the arms of her chair, to the heavy white mouldings of the ceiling above, then crossed her knees, and looked down lovingly at one extremely narrow and pretty foot: she had always thanked God she was not cursed with an instep.

"You are awfully out of it, Cinders," she said calmly, "or you would know that brains are a drug in the market nowadays. 'Brains?' said a great newspaper monopolist to me the other day with the utmost contempt, 'I can buy them by the hundredweight!'"

"And yet," cried Cinders indignantly, "though you may torture, humiliate these poor literary people, the spirit laughs at, and escapes you! The body may sit fireless, hungry, but the soul of it is out and away, enjoying visions that you or I never do! So you can't insult or hurt real genius much. It is talent that is the born financier, not genius."

"Anyway," said Celia, who was extremely practical, "brains never helped to solve the problem of a man's constancy yet. It is the man who is always on the

rut, trying to keep his wife out of mischief, who never finds time to be fooling round on his own account; he is a bear of course often, but that's better than being always on the grin because some woman outside is making him happy. Though really, what with trying to restrain the brilliancy of their wives and to endure the unutterable dulness of their mistresses, men haven't half such a good time as people suppose!"

Cinders suddenly sprang to her feet, glad of the interruption.

"What are they shouting in the street?" she cried, the blood tingling in her veins, fear in her eyes. ..

Celia glanced at the clock.

"It is time Hallé's people were here," she said, and at that moment the servant entered, and announced that some one from Hallé was waiting to see her.

"Something subdued to wear at my last dinner with Andrew," said Celia, moving with alacrity. "If he comes, amuse him till I return,"—the rest was lost on her way to the door.

CHAPTER II

"If you go to Magersfontein at the breaking of the day,
You can see the laddies marching as the mists are rolled away.
Oh, you'll hear no footsteps coming
And no steady beat of drumming,
But just hold your breath and listen
While the hilltops flash and glisten
And you'll hear the bagpipes play.
For it's Wauchope's laddies marching at the breaking of the day.
And the sullen Dutchmen mutter
At the message that they utter,
And they think of Magersfontein where the pride of Scotland lay.
For they know, while Wauchope's coming
Without sound of feet or drumming,
That the flag the laddies bled for will float there all the day.
Till the granite of the North Land like the mist is rolled away,
And the ghosts leave Magersfontein ere the breaking of the day."

CINDERS listened intently for a few moments, gave a slight, hopeless gesture, then switched out the electric lights shaded by red tulips that made still more delightful the rose, and white, and black of the room, and fell into a brown study before the blazing fire, sitting on the ground in the favourite attitude which had suggested her nickname. She did not even rouse out of it when a man's step fell soundlessly on the

thick carpet, and Celia's lover filled the chair Celia had just vacated.

"'Rags and tatters, belts and bayonets,
On they swung, the drum a-rolling,
Mum and sour. It looked like fighting,
And they meant it too, by thunder!'"

she suddenly declaimed, at first half-aloud, but the thunder came out with a bang, and the man laughed audibly.

Cinders started, and looked round, but did not relax her attitude, only her arms tightened nervously about her knees as she said—

"Celia's upstairs with Hallé," then resumed her gaze into the fire.

"I had no idea you were so warlike," said the newcomer in amused tones. "I really believe you would like to go and fight yourself."

"Very much," said Cinders, "and it would work off some of the surplus women; at present we are a drug in the market. It's no wonder you men give yourselves such airs."

"But do we?" he said thoughtfully.

"*You* don't. Are you going to the front?"

"What will Celia say?"

"What does it matter? Go, go, go!" Her eyes flashed in the firelight as she turned them upon him.

"I suppose you have a sweetheart," he said, leaning forward to look at her. "Did you tell *him* to go?"

"Haven't got one," said Cinders; "if I had, and he *didn't* go, I'd murder him. When do you sail?"

"In ten days."

"Better late than never," said Cinders. "If you see B.P. will you please give him my love? And Bobs and Kitchener; I love them all, and I mean to be *true* to them three! And Kitchener *is* human," she added eagerly; "do you know what he said once when he had to give a description of some man for purposes of identification? 'Remember he has blue eyes—blue like mine!'"

Andrew laughed, keenly amused. This quiet little girl, invisible in the dazzling neighbourhood of Celia, had a distinct gleam of her own when looked at by herself. And Celia had a singular incapacity for hero-worship, and considered that the proper study of mankind is woman—of woman, emphatically herself.

"I beg your pardon for forgetting, but what is your real name?" he said.

"Devon, at your service; once known as Cinderella, now as Cinders; and further in descent to the dust-bin no poor girl can possibly go!"

He laughed and said—for Celia's name was at the top of his throat, and at the slightest shake out it came—

"What relation really are you to Mrs. Schilizzi?"

"I am her husband's cousin, not hers. I did not know him."

"I never think of Celia as having been married," he

said slowly, and yet with a sense rather than sound of deep resentment in his tone.

"Some women never look married," said Cinders. "They are labelled contraband, and Celia is one of them. Even if it were forced on you that she had a husband, you would feel he was an accident, of no sort of real consequence to her social career!"

He frowned, and she knew that her inconvenient frankness had betrayed her.

"How have you found time to think so much?" he said, looking at her keenly; "you are very young."

"We lived very quietly in the country owing to my parents' ill health," she said; "thus it happens that the time which other girls spend in being happy, I have spent in reading and exploring what I am pleased to call my mind, and as it does no one any harm, I mean to go on exploring. There are tens of thousands of girls' lives here in England like mine, divided between the arm-chairs of their parents, and books, and Nature. But now, now my dear old people are dead, and I am free to wander. Why should we be anchored all our lives to tables and chairs?"

"How long have you lost *them?*" he said.

"Nearly two years," she said gravely, then looked quickly up at him, hesitated, but went on. "Don't you think old folks who are long over their dying are treated all wrong?" she said softly. "Don't *insist* on their dying, don't sing a dirge over them; try rather to sharpen their appetite for the good things they can

still enjoy; *indulge* them, make them plucky, encourage them to say good-bye cheerily: and I tried to do it, and they went off in gallant style at the last, within a few hours of each other. Wasn't it beautiful of them, and loyal. But you have a mother?" she added gently.

He shook his head, and the shadow on his face told that he had loved her greatly. She had given him the right impulse towards women, to protect and be kind to them; and there is more in such early training than is generally supposed. Many a man who is thoughtless, selfish, unchivalrous even, to what he professes to love, can trace such failure in honour and duty to the feminine influence of his childish years.

"And so there will be no one to worry over you at the front," said Cinders soberly, but stopped abruptly, for Andrew's eyes spelt the everlasting Celia.

"It's true," she said, and tossed her head defiantly. This man had *got* to get used to it, that Celia would never really care for any one or anything on earth but herself. A woman with a little heart is like a child's hand; you can't fill or hurt either much, there is so little to beat or to fill.

"If you had been a man, you would have been an awful rip," Andrew exclaimed, as she turned her face, and their eyes met. In hers showed a curious refraction of light that is the outward and visible sign of the humour that goes with a light heart, and an intense faculty for getting the best fun possible out of life and

life's little ironies. Baden-Powell has such merry eyes, and the spirit behind them is never beaten.

"I envy you," she said, "to be one of those who fight, not those who wait."

"Does Celia envy me?"

"Celia judges you by herself, and is sure she would climb a tree, or dig a hole in the sand directly fighting began. Like the Guardsman who relates that he brought away on his nose more Modder River sand than any other man in his battalion, he thrust it into the ground so vigorously during the terrific hail of bullets! He also frankly confessed that all the time the battle lasted, his heart was no less vigorously engaged in praying."

He leaned his head on his hand, and looked at her thoughtfully, and she looked at him. He had a clean-shaven, stern, strong face, one that would be noticed anywhere, and the man had a story, and one entirely to his credit. Involuntarily she thought of glorious Wauchope, proud of his Black Watch, as they of him, the very heart and soul of it, tricked and leading them in the grey of dawn into that awful trench of fire, whence hardly one emerged alive, his voice rolling out clear above the confusion, "Steady, men, steady!" as they reeled before the crash of a thousand rifles not fifty yards from them, then, as he fell riddled with bullets, shouting out, "Rally round, boys, and do your duty!"

"Aren't you proud of being Scotch?" she said suddenly.

"I see that you like us."

"*Love* you," she said. "You are so true. No one saith that the three hundred Fabii were defeated, but that they were slain,' you know; and 'See how my dandies fight,' exclaimed Wellington. To-day that is matched by a captured Boer who said, 'We couldn't understand the Grenadiers, for the faster we fired the faster they came on.' And you mean to avenge them," she added.

The girl's voice thrilled, an electric wave of sympathy passed from her to Celia's lover, the long fine lines of the man's face toughened, and in that moment he looked stern and terrible, as one of those who had stood by Wauchope's grave.

"I mean to try. How keen you are on it all, and how you would love the danger and excitement of the game. You would be invaluable—a perfect Mark Tapley among your men."

"An ounce of cheerfulness is worth a pound of sadness to serve God with," cried Cinders. "The temper of the nation is the temper of the individual. As Tommy says, 'That place has *got* to be took, and we're going to take it.' Don't those amateur strategists make you furious, who sit with war maps on their flaccid knees, finding fault with our brave generals, and screaming out what *they* would do? Oh, it makes my blood boil! They can't be sportsmen!"

Andrew laughed, and Celia, opening the dining-room door, and finding it in darkness, save for the dull red

glow of the coals, at first supposed it empty, then, as she switched on the light, Cinders showed in her dark frock and familiar attitude, and Andrew sitting in attitude alert, interested, in the chair beside her.

She came slowly towards them in her trailing white garments, and Cinders, reverting immediately to her usual post of unconsidered onlooker, sprang up, and immediately effaced herself.

CHAPTER III

"I sometimes think that never blows so red
The rose as where some buried Cæsar bled;
That every hyacinth the garden wears
Dropt on her lap from some once lovely head."

CELIA always suggested one of a procession in "A Dream of Fair Women," in her height, her beauty, the perfect harmony of outline and movement that followed an undeviating law of rhythmical grace, even her long-lashed blue eyes were the eyes of a goddess used to the worship of mankind. But for the first time Andrew missed something in those eyes—noted that they held no dancing light as did Cinders's. What if he never *did* find in them that spark which should kindle into flame his own soul? To be sure there was no sterile predominance of intellect about Celia, and up to now he had found her quite clever enough to please him.

"That is a very bright little girl," he said as the door closed. "I have never had a chance of talking to her before."

"I didn't know that you had even noticed her," said Celia.

"But I did. I asked you who that merry-eyed child was who had come to stay with you, and you said 'Nobody.' That's just what she isn't. But don't,"

he added, half-jestingly, half-masterfully, "be *too* modern with her—to be genuine is so rare!"

Celia looked at him in surprise. That horrid war had evidently demoralised him; a man must be very off-guard indeed to talk to one woman about another!

"And are you going to the front?" she said, sitting down in the chair from which he had risen.

"Yes."

Her face changed, and he winced under the change. He loved her sufficiently to hate to see that soft feminity harden towards him.

"Do you bid me stay?" he said.

She laid her fair head back against the black oak chair, and studied him a moment before she said,—

"No; it would be of no use."

"It would be of no use," he repeated. "I will write as often as possible."

"There may not be a post office upstairs, or down below," said Celia profanely. "It surely might put you off going, to think of me shivering and shaking in a grimy crowd at the War Office afraid to read the list of casualties!"

"No man could die better," he said, "and he can die but once. There are such things left in the world, thank God, as patriotism, honour, and glory."

"It's better to be a live Boer than a dead Englishman," objected Celia. Hitherto she had regarded the war impersonally; now that it threatened real loss to her she treated it as an enemy.

He was leaning forward with loosely clasped hands; the character and distinction of the man showed out clear, but something in his manner did not please her, and she let him know it.

"Cinders has been infecting you," she said, with a kind of indignant surprise. "If she put on boy's clothes, and ran away to the front, I should not be at all surprised."

"She is slim and boyish enough to do it certainly," said Andrew. "I like her frank *gaminerie*."

"And plain enough," said Celia, smarting no less under this praise of the absent than his maddening lack of tact.

"Plain?" he said, frowning; "no—decidedly not plain."

"She has a nose that she can hang her hat on, as she herself says," remarked Celia, instinctively passing a forefinger down the straight, delicate, rather long feature that was one of her best points.

Now there is much virtue in a nose, for it usually errs from want, or from excess (either of which is fatal), and makes all the difference between a profile that satisfies you with plenteous beauty, sweeping you on the crest of an exquisite fulfilment, or pulls you up short with a nasty jar and shock, thereby enraging you. And Celia's upper lip was short, and roughly speaking, the world of women may be divided into two classes, the short-lipped women whom men love and work for, and the good, hard-working beasts with long upper-lips whom men

graciously allow to work for themselves—and sometimes for them also.

"Cinders' skin and eyes are not bad certainly," admitted Celia, wishing to appear handsome about the girl.

"And a lovely mouth," said Andrew; "apart from its colour, it has wonderful corners—a real Reynolds mouth."

Celia sat upright in astonishment.

"You *mean* it?" she said. "Cinders' mouth? Oh!" and she went off into a fit of real laughter.

"I really mean it," he said gravely.

Celia regarded him blankly for a moment, lifting a delicate surprised hand to her own lips.

"I always thought," she said, in tones that asked to be contradicted, "that my mouth was too small;" then, as no answer came, she reddened beneath this first blow to her self-conceit that he had ever dealt her.

"When do you go?" she said, with an abrupt change of conversation.

"In about a fortnight."

"Don't walk about in your khâki," she said, "it's so cheap."

He laughed, and leaned across, and took her hand in his, and looked in her eyes, to which wounded vanity had for the moment granted almost as bright a sparkle as Cinders's.

"Dear," he said, "are you going to make me happy if I come back?"

But Celia looked away, by no means in a melting mood.

"It will be time enough to talk about that if you do return," she said.

But the mere touch of her hand had renewed her spell over him; her lips tempted him as she lay back, and he got up, and kissed them.

"There!" he said. "Do you let any one else do that?"

For a moment she did not answer; she was struggling against the personal influence he had over her, that influence with which a woman has always to reckon when she sets out to break hearts for amusement, expecting herself to escape scot free.

"Prove your love," she said, "by staying with me. *Les absents ont toujours tort*, you know, and I might find it impossible to remember you."

"Forget me if you like," he said, "but don't remember Arundel. He is—" he stopped abruptly. "I'm not jealous," he said, and laughed, "only—you would regret it."

"I have no idea of marrying," said Celia.

"Oh, but you *will* have—if I insist on it," he said.

"Can you put up with anything less than a Reynolds' mouth?" she said, and for answer he kissed her again.

"You've never let Arundel do that?" he whispered. Celia put up the back of her hand to his mouth to guard her own, but he drew it down and repeated his question.

"I like clean-shaven men," she admitted, but would not be persuaded into confirming or denying the impeachment.

"Well," said Andrew, "I'm not a greedy man, but I like my own little crib all to myself, and the first time I catch Arundel kissing you"—Celia laughed—"will be the last time you'll kiss me," concluded Andrew grimly.

And Arundel might be the smartest man in town, but he had not the same length of limb, nor was he hard as bronze, without one ounce of superfluous flesh on him, like Andrew.

"You need not go out unless you choose. It is no dishonour to you not to volunteer; your duty is at home—with me." She whispered the two last words in his ear, and dropped a kiss on his hair.

He drew her hand to his lips in recognition of it, then said, knitting his brows—

"I wish you could see it in the right spirit." ("That little girl did just now," he said to himself in an aside.) "To be able to take my share of fighting, yet to shirk it, would be a disgrace to me—and to you also, sweet, if you truly love me."

"But—if you are killed?" whispered Celia.

There were tears in her voice; when she sat thus quietly with Andrew, those long muscular arms of his around her that held her easily as a child, she felt quite sure that she loved him dearly, and could not live without him. The man's heart beat thickly; he knew to the full her capriciousness, and that she should care

for him out of all the lovers who wanted to annex her, was the subtlest flattery that could be offered to a male and jealous mind. And to cut out Arundel, his old enemy, was in itself no light honour.

"Dear," he said, and drew her closer, with an odd feeling that she was really his wife, and they had snatched this lovers' hour here by the fire in memory of sweetheart days, before going up to dress for dinner. "Write me as often as you can," he said, "and I'll take every opportunity of doing so to you."

But a dull resentment fought in her heart with a very real love; she had a terrified feeling that for the first time in her life sharp pain, that she *had* to go through with, lay before her, and in that access of self-pity, tears fell down her cheeks, and splashed upon his face, moving him greatly, for a weeping Celia had probably never before been seen by mortal lover.

"You won't flirt with Arundel while I am gone?" he whispered, for the closer she drew to him, the more active became his proprietorial jealous instinct; "you'll never let him take you in his arms as I do now?"

"I wouldn't *dare!*" cried Celia in genuine fear.

"I keep my love for you only," said Andrew, and lifted her head, looked long in her eyes, and kissed her again and again on the mouth and throat. He was fastidious, and no faintest breath of scent on Celia or her clothes ever offended his taste; she was just fresh and balmy as a perfectly healthy woman

ought to be; yet he closed his eyes as if her fragrant personality mounted to his head.

"And now, sweetheart, 'tis good-bye for the present."

"You won't stay and dine?" said Celia, and sighed. Two women *tête-à-tête* at dinner was the Deluge.

"Not to-night. Will you dine with me at the Carlton to-morrow, and do a play after?"

"Yes. I must bring Cinders or Alix, you know. I haven't yet joined the Light Brigade of widows and married women."

"Let it be Cinders," he said; and Celia instantly resolved to bring Alix.

"By the way," she said, "there's something between Alix and Arundel. I'm sure of it, by the way she never looks at him in talking; to take so much trouble *not* to see him is positively compromising. But it's exclusively between her and him, not George and her."

"Poor girl," he said; "be as kind to her as you can." He seemed on the point of saying something else, but checked himself, and then he and Celia made lingering farewell, and she went upstairs to dress. It was the loneliness of her evenings that had more than once almost precipitated her into the hangman's noose of matrimony, but half-way up the stairs she remembered something, and stopped dead.

"A Reynolds' mouth indeed!" she said indignantly "impudent little wretch!"

CHAPTER IV

"There dwells a wife by the Northern Gate,
A wealthy wife is she;
She breeds a breed of roving sons,
And sends them over the sea.
And some are drowned in deep water,
And some in sight of shore;
But word goes back to the weary wife,
And ever she sendeth more."

WHEN you are not tripped up by a pain in your tooth, or your heart, or your pocket, and the machinery of your body runs so smoothly that mere movement is a delight, a walk on a fine morning is a glorious thing, and Cinders stepped out gaily, and was not seriously dashed when she met a newsboy delightedly shrieking out the bad news that was his soul's delight.

But Cinders merely set her Tam o' Shanter hat at a more defiant angle, and took up the whole of the pavement as if she had just heard of a great victory. Suddenly a carriage without a driver passed her quickly, and though she admired the horse's spirit (possibly affected by the unrest of the times), she scented catastrophe when he turned the corner of South Audley Street, so ran her fastest, and caught the reins just as a man seized the horse's head on the other side, and brought it to a halt.

Across the steed's Roman nose the man and girl keeked at each other, then both laughed, and as the coachman ran up in a panic, Andrew Mackenzie came round and saluted her.

"You are very enterprising," he said, "and very cheerful," he added, as they shook hands. "But why in black? You don't propose, I hope, to join in that universal day of humiliation that the Little Englanders want us to set apart?"

"Black!" cried Cinders, with flashing eyes. "Why, I would dress in scarlet from head to foot if it were not that I hate colours in the street! Humiliation! For what? Rather let us appoint a day to thank God that we have such men, such officers to lead them. The Queen, bless her! who always does the right, the womanly thing, has already knocked out *that* idea. And this new reverse," she went on confidentially, "simply means that Tommy is having more jam! He has a perfect passion for jam, and after a big battle he is treated to extra jam; indeed blood and raspberry jam seem inseparably connected in his mind! And what *have* we got to worry about? 'If it is difficult,' said a French Minister once to his king, 'it can be done; if it is impossible it shall be done.' And Bobs and Kitchener will do it."

"How enthusiastic you are," he said, "and altogether for the right." Most of the women he knew had enthusiasm only for their personal hobbies, and fads, and pleasures.

Cinders blinked. He wouldn't say that much when he knew her better!

"How is Celia this morning?" he inquired eagerly. "You'll be awfully good to her while I'm away, won't you? She is rather easily led."

Now if Cinders possessed any one gift, it was that of getting inside the mind of the person she happened to be with, and this unbending of the man's stern nature under the influence of a love that he did not fear to show (unlike most men who hide their emotions as vices), and that by its freshness and whole-heartedness was clearly the first that had ever found place in his life, roused her to unwonted admiration and envy. And to turn a man like that into a god, it took a Celia!

Her little nervous hand went out, and gripped his like a man.

"If you mean that you want George Arundel kept off, I will try and do it," she said, and then they moved on again.

Andrew looked down at her as she walked with a wonderful spring and verve beside him, all the vivid life of her concentred in her eyes. He noted the simplicity of the piquante black velvet hat, the neat coat and skirt meant for walking, and suddenly it occurred to him that he had never had a real walk with Celia, her trailing draperies were only suited to just getting in, and out of, a carriage, or an elegant round of visits and shopping.

At the bottom of his soul a really manly man hates the fighting woman when he does not deeply pity her, but he had not yet "placed" Cinders, and she read his thoughts, and he knew it, and tried to classify her as she turned towards him, in her face something intangible, mischievous, altogether delightful to any male eye that was not completely filled by Celia.

"You look very happy," he said, and smiled, his eyes so visibly accusing her of going to meet a lover, that she shook her head in direct denial. With Cinders it was always easy to talk without words.

"Don't you know," she said, "that if you have a hobby and ride it to death it's better than—than—" she hesitated, but he knew that she meant "to love." "And there's lots of time," she added gaily. "Some people want to gobble everything up at once, that's greedy—one at a time, please! First frolicking youth, then the enjoyment born of experience—then a first-rate chef——"

"And where does Love come in, pray?"

"In most lives never. His double may look in at your window; but he is usually a spook, and easily frightened away from the door. Have you ever noticed a young Turk of a boy, walking about *insouciant*, happy, with his hands in his breeches' pockets—and you may be quite sure he has other pockets out of sight? Well, a girl has only *one* to put her money into, and her ambitions, and her heart; and if one scrowges out the other, why, that's *her* lookout. I've

never found room in my one pocket for my heart—and I won't either."

"Which way are you going?" he said, for involuntarily they had turned back towards the Park. "We might walk part of the way together. Celia is never visible before twelve. I hope she won't be late, as I must leave her at one," and his brow clouded as at a painful thought.

"I always get up early," said Cinders; "except to sleep in, I loathe my bed, there's such lots of time for lying down when we are dead. So you are going out to fight, not to sketch," she added, as they walked briskly beneath the leafless trees. "Somehow—" and she turned and looked at him, not completing the sentence.

"I don't convey the impression of an artist," he said, greatly amused at something in her eyes that she was quite unconscious of.

"N—no—you look too sure of yourself. An artist is never sure; he belongs to the tides, the wind, the moon, nature, a thousand things. It's seldom he ever puts in a real valid claim on himself. You look far more like a fighter."

Andrew laughed, putting her last remark by.

"And you would rather that I were happy than a genuine artist," he said; "and you are right."

"But I envy you," she exclaimed; "the hang, the space of a studio fascinates me. When the sun-god looks in, it is glorious. How different to the writer

who sits down with a piece of paper and an inkpot, working in the dark, not able to tell if what he does is well or ill done! And, best of all, you can work in the open air. To trap beauty, and immortalise it——"

"But we don't," he said, and his face fell. "I used to think that an artist in words had the best of it. *He* leaves something to the imagination: *our* smudged failures do not; but I doubt it now. I remember"—he moved slowly, and his eyes became introspective—"a famous author tried the experiment abroad last year. We were in what we called our 'asphodel' meadow; but there was no asphodel, only, blending with the grass, were sheets of mauve crocus springing singly, and light as wind flowers; the effect was marvellously lovely. . . . A torrent of trees rushed down the hill-side to the gorge by which we sat, and the shadows of hyacinth on the lake below, the purple bloom on the distant mountains (and to me, as to Byron, high mountains are a *feeling*), the golden atmosphere of full summer—how could brush and pigment set it down?"

"And then," said Cinders softly, "the other, the artist in words, tried."

"The brush moved swiftly," said Andrew, "the passionate heart spoke. It was a duel between the colour of words, the speech of eyes . . . and the greatest artist of all, looked, and listened, and laughed, and beat us both; and we had the sense to know it. It was like trying to burlesque Him with a bit of charcoal, or pelt that majesty with piled up adjectives, when through

the common highway of sight all that beauty could be drawn in at first hand!"

"And yet," cried Cinders, "your imitation, rude as it might be in your own eyes, by suggesting beauty to those who have never seen the original, may do finer work than if you had kept it all to yourself, never tried to pass it on, which is the only true religion."

"I don't know," he said slowly. "I often think that dumb worship is the truest, the most eloquent; that those who yield up their souls in worship to the invisible Creator of all that loveliness, pay the highest tribute that can be paid to that greatness. There was a third person of our party, who neither painted nor wrote, yet her beauty and silence contributed more to the poetry of the scene than anything we could say or do; for her eyes and gown held the colour of the lake, of the sky, the mountains; she brought into perfect harmony all that loveliness and peace. Oh, happy summer's day!" he cried suddenly, throwing his arms out like a boy trying to recapture a glorious holiday. "Oh, asphodel meadow! Such hours come but once in a lifetime."

Cinders nodded.

"Place a primula and a bit of mignonette side by side," she said, "and you get the hot, rich scent of a cowslip; apart, each is clean, and cold, and sweet, but it is not perfection. And when you get the asphodel meadow, and the one human touch also to give zest to it, you have heaven."

She spoke bravely, but a deep feeling of pity stirred in her for him, for she knew now that the third person had been Celia. It was in the garden of the Savoy that Andrew had met her for the first time the preceding summer, and Celia had no feeling for mountains, and frankly hated the place; a decent woman was completely out of everything; and the cocottes were better turned out than she was, and all the best men attended their courts, and neglected hers.

"Oh, grim covenanter!" she thought, "you are just such a fool as the rest of them, and I love you for it; to be like that, without pose, nothing between you and other folks' souls."

"Don't you think," she said, "that if a gypsy or a tramp could write a book about Nature, and a cow were able to paint a picture, we should get nearer to nature than we ever did before? Fancy the long sweet hours the animal has in which to study her subject in every mood and phase; think of the life, movement, outdoor experience the tramp gets; indeed to that poor byword alone belongs the fulness and glory of the earth! Do you know that I envy the poorest and humblest creature alive who has courage to strike himself clear of four walls? And one's most living thoughts," she went on confidentially, "come to one quite independently of thought—when one is washing one's hands, or packing—it is nature working on her own lines of observation; and you may depend upon it she tells that ruminating cow and careless tramp no end of things she won't tell you or me!"

He laughed, and said sadly, for already a current of mental sympathy was established between them, "I have neither the tramp's nor the cow's advantages, and fear I shall never do anything that will live."

She was silent, for it was his story that made the possibility tragic. He had been born with the gift of "form"; had been refused an art education by his father, then sent to the bar where he was making a great name, when a relative left him a fortune, and at over thirty years of age he had begun to learn from the beginning the thing that he loved. Yet the man's real strength lay in his eloquence, and iron strength of brain and character, but he did not know it, and always there was that strong feeling with Cinders that his gifts were other than artistic.

"And you," he said, looking at her keenly, for there was about her a splendid capacity for life in its fulness of joy, love, passion, and despair, that if not genius is intimately allied with it; "you do something, of course. What is it?"

She shook her head.

"I *live*," she said; "that is enough."

He looked at her again.

"I am afraid," he said, "that you possess the fatal Hellenic gift of seeing the value of joy and sunshine and gladness—the beauty of life, and not solely the beauty of goodness."

"Afraid," she cried quickly; "why not envy me?"

He smiled, warmed by her joyousness. Yet did not this girl's perfect capacity to entertain happiness, when the fugitive crossed her path, ensure an equal power of intense suffering?

"I have never seen any of your work yet," she said. "But I will."

"Promise me," he exclaimed, "not to look at anything of mine before I go. If I don't come back, you will be relieved of the disagreeable duty of telling me that I have mistaken my vocation."

"I promise," she said. "And if you have not done it as well as you wished, you will do something better out there. And I wish you good luck."

Their eyes met; why had not Celia looked like that, fired his blood with that stirring bugle-call to duty, to honour?

For a moment the militant spirit in the one called to the other, then a clock struck twelve, and he started violently. After all, thought poor Cinders, she was only a stop-gap.

As they were about to cross Park Lane, a man in a passing hansom leaned out, and raised his hat to Cinders, at the same time nodding to Andrew, who acknowledged the salutation coldly, while Cinders did not respond to it at all.

"I hate that man," she flashed out; "it's a wicked face. Handsome? So is a tiger."

"Arundel is said to be the best-looking man in town," said Andrew drily. "But I have your promise

to try and make Celia discourage his visits as much as possible while I am away."

"But if she loves you, she won't want him to come," cried Cinders hotly.

"He can be very persistent," said Andrew, then paused,—a real man so very seldom speaks against a fellow-man, even if he have just cause to hate and loathe him. When he fears that his tongue is likely to bolt with him he usually runs away, and feeling upon him a strong temptation that he had best have yielded to, Andrew raised his hat hurriedly, and left her.

"Poor Cinderella!" she said to herself ruefully, and then, as an after-thought, "poorer Andrew."

CHAPTER V

"We regard the tribute Nature demands of us as impurity and vice, and yet the restraint of moral laws often appears to us hollow and far-fetched. Thus we vacillate perpetually between defiance and the fear of them. We crave for the good opinion of the world in which we don't believe, and tremble in the face of its condemnation, which we despise and condemn in our hearts."

CINDERS walked through the Park as far as possible before striking the neighbourhood of Paddington, where she presently stopped at a neat house that somehow suggested the country, a hope more than realised by the delightfully fresh person in a lilac cotton gown who opened the door.

"And how are you, Dinah?" exclaimed the girl, and kissed warmly the rosy, kind face, for here was something real, while Celia's cheek, except to a man, was slippery and intangible; but when she was settled in the big chintz-covered chair sacred to "Miss Cynthy," she saw that though overjoyed to see her, at the back of Dinah's mind there was a pressing trouble that she sought to hide.

"And how was Sir Robert when you heard from him last?" said Dinah, and Cinders frowned; it is always annoying when your personality is so vividly associated with another's in certain people's minds, that to see one is to call up the other.

"Oh! he's all right," she said. "He has his hunting and his dogs; what more does he want?"

"Why, you, Miss Cynthy," said Dinah indignantly. "With the Friary waiting for you, and you making your home with strangers, and first with nobody now."

"Women have no business in a Friary!" cried Cinders. "And pray why is he careering about with a pack of hounds, and the hunting field all to himself, when every sportsman worthy of the name has got to the front long ago?"

Dinah sniffed. She sometimes thought it unfair that a pretty girl should somersault into the very best the earth afforded, clean over the heads of the men who had stubbornly to fight and contest every inch of the way to happiness, success, or anything else they might happen to want.

"It isn't for want of trying," she said incautiously.

"So you hear from him!" cried Cinders indignantly; "well, you can just tell your young M.F.H. that at last I have fallen in love. At last!"

Dinah went pale, and the pain in her eyes made Cinders relent.

"Goose," she said. "You can tell him so if you like, but it isn't true."

"Miss Cynthy," said Dinah heavy-heartedly, "I never did hold with your leaving the place where everybody knew and loved you, and your family, to see life with a lady who is only a sort of cousin. It can't be like your own home. Not that I ever thought much of

matrimony myself, and to have a prickly thistle attached to you at bed and board is more than can be expected of any poor woman; sometimes it takes a lifetime to extract the prickles, so that you can lie soft."

"In short," said Cinders, with dancing eyes, "it's much better to belong to yourself, whose vagaries you pretty well know, than to a stranger who may have fifty little tricks you can't break him of without ruining your temper and his!"

Dinah gave the nod of bitter experience.

"Well," she said, "I've had about enough of being a woman in this world; in the next I hope I'll be a man. But if you could turn them into women for a bit, and they saw how we depended on a man for all our little bits of pleasure, perhaps they'd be different. For a man's joys are his own—his sorrows are his wife's."

"Dinah," cried Cinders, looking round at the country purity of the room, "you may *say* you have been married, but I don't believe it! You are a born old maid, and your neatness is something to shudder at! Now I spill my things all over the place, and the continual dropping, mislaying, and losing of our property and money show that it's a perfectly unnatural habit we should have any, much less carry it about. Isn't the Lost Property Office an eloquent and standing protest against civilised habits? But tell me about Buckle—he *looked* a Tartar—only I do hate a man who hasn't a will of his own!"

"Well, Miss Cynthy, I don't hold with weak men; if they do everything you tell them, they very often do things you *don't* tell them, on the sly. But Tom was too much the other way, right down contrary, and cantankerous *he* were. Sometimes of a Sunday we'd go out for a bit of a walk, but I never went far, as it made the time longer to quarrel in, coming back. And if I said 'It's a beautiful day—look at the clouds over there on the hill,' he'd say 'Cows?' and look in the wrong direction. '*Clouds*,' says I. '*Cows*,' says he, and clouds and cows 'twould be till I'd taken off my best bonnet," and Dinah sighed. "And so it always was in everything: where I saw clouds he saw cows. P'raps if we'd had a child of our own, 'twould have been neither 'Clouds' nor 'Cows' with us—or p'raps both—but the child first."

Cinders nodded, and changed the subject abruptly. With some women, childlessness is a pang that death itself cannot allay.

"What sets me most against marriage," she said, frowning, "is the kissing. The way it's done, I mean!"

"Gracious, Miss Cynthy! However do you know?"

"I've looked. And I long ago came to the conclusion that there could be nothing more scrappy in life than most married people's kisses—there was neither body, nor flavour, nor sweetness in them, judged by the faces of the pecker and the pecked; and I have firmly resolved never to kiss a man unless I really and truly mean it. I would prefer a good honest bite any day!"

"But Sir Robert's different to Buckle. Love," said Dinah, smoothing her silk apron meditatively, "is like an Irish stew; put it on the fire hours and hours before you want it—then forget it—and when you come to eat it, it's delicious. Sit down and watch it, and it's not worth dishing up. Seems to me that the longer Sir Robert waits, the nicer he gets, and the more he loves you."

"How do you know he gets nicer?" cried Cinders, with strong suspicion. "I believe he runs up now and then to see you!"

"And what if he does, Miss Cynthy? And you forbidden him the house in Norfolk Street for a whole year!"

"I wish I hadn't," said Cinders, and frowned. "We want a rude Boreas of a man to hustle us out of the petty, scratchy little ways we women are all falling into!"

"Don't you set up to be unwomanly, Miss Cynthy," said Dinah gently; "that's the fault of all the London ladies—and the men don't like it. Lord, Miss, everybody's afraid to be their true selves—seems as if they tried to be somebody else—and them not nice. Look at your dear old folks at home. *They* never made any pretences. Your mother would put on a colour *he* liked when she was quite old, and blush up when he praised her in it, and you used to stare and whisper to me, 'Buckle, they're paying each other *compliments!*' And some day, when you and Sir Robert are old, with young,

fresh hearts, *you*'ll blush and sigh, and think the old people weren't so very ridiculous after all!"

But Cinders was turning over in her mind the amazing intelligence that Bobbie had actually dared to think for himself, and try to get to the front when she supposed him to be meekly awaiting her return in the country.

"Dinah," she said, "Sir Robert can't be spared; tell him so with my compliments when you write."

"And don't you ever write yourself, Miss Cynthy?" said Dinah reproachfully, "and him as handsome, and straight, and strong as a poplar; they don't grow such men up here."

"I'm not sure," said Cinders meditatively, "that I don't like a healthy human animal, he's such a rest. And the stupider and kinder he is, the more tenacious he is; the subtle man who thoroughly understands one woman will understand a million, and make every one of them wretched."

"You always was so high-flown, Miss Cynthy," said Dinah patiently. "All the virtues and all the senses but common sense, as your dear mother used to say."

"Now if there is anything *mean*," cried Cinders indignantly, "it's quoting things said by poor souls who are dead, or out of their minds, so that you can't possibly ask them if they *did* say it. How angry mother would be if she could hear you!"

"Well, Miss Cynthy," said Dinah, sighing, "romantic

you always was and will be. When you was a child you'd snatch a pebble, and turn it this way and that, and see light sparkle everywhere that wasn't, and you'd worship it, till one day—one day—you'd see 'twas just a pebble, and throw it away. Then when you came across a real diamond you'd throw *that* away, thinking 'twas a pebble. And that's how you're serving poor Sir Robert. But I did the best I could for you, and seeing you so set on coming to dirty London, why I came too."

"It *is* dirty," said Cinders thoughtfully, "inside and out. Town seems to me the Paradise of the rich, and the Hell of the poor."

"But you've done your best to ease it to those last, Miss Cynthy," said Dinah, and again there was that look of trouble in her eye. "Waifs and strays in plenty have you harboured here, speeding them on their way either to a new start in this world, or the next; but I shall be glad when *you* go back and *I* go back to our old way of living. You won't be wanting to go upstairs to-day?"

"Why are you afraid that I shall? I believe you've got an infectious case there, and are dying to get me out of the house."

"Not infectious—though sin's awful catching," Dinah added below her breath. "But it isn't a case your mother would have liked you to know about, Miss Cynthy, so you'll just leave it to me, if you please."

"I don't think," meditated Cinders, "that any one

who has lived with Mrs. Schilizzi and her set can be very easily shocked. Who is it?" she added aloud; "if you don't tell me, I shall just walk up and see."

"It's a girl, Miss Cynthy," said Dinah grudgingly and in trouble. "Whether it was an accident, or she meant it, she was just over the edge of the platform at Bishop's Road when I caught her skirts, and pulled her back."

"Suicide!" said Cinders, white and cold and angry. It was the one supreme act of moral cowardice in man or woman that she found it impossible to forgive. "And where is the man?" she said, after a pause.

"Ah! Miss Cynthy, where was he in Scripture when the woman was shamed before all the world? He wasn't fetched; he wasn't even mentioned. Most like he was the first of them that threw stones at her. And it's been the same ever since. Well, I brought her back here. Her name is Rowan; it's on her handkerchief; and she's a minx. I've been a servant myself, and ought to know a jade when I see one."

"O Dinah! Dinah," cried Cinders passionately, knowing that her old nurse would not understand, but what she felt herself most keenly, most strongly, on the subject refused to remain unspoken. "It is all wrong for us women; we break our hearts over man's laws, not God's, and we haven't a chance. When a man does wrong it is Nature; when a woman follows Nature's laws it is a crime, and man punishes her heavily."

She stopped, disheartened by what she saw n Dinah's face, for the woman was old, and Cinders was young, and Dinah knew that the laws of man are not so hard as they appear, but in the end make for the peace and health, if not the happiness, of women. And there was little enough of the penitent about that minx upstairs—a pretty creature with lovely hair and skin, young, and not afraid of the sunshine, deceitful, too: her smile was sugar.

Dinah sighed resignedly. When Miss Cynthia was off on her high horse, who should stop her? And she was worth listening to, for all she said was so beautiful and book-learned, though (after the fashion of books) quite impossible of application. Nevertheless, the old woman put in her protest.

"Miss Cynthia," she said, "it ain't respectable. Folks who hear you talk like that, will think you are putting in a word for yourself. These own maids who have lived with fast society ladies aren't as innocent as you think. Don't you go up; cripples and starving folks are different."

"Which is worse, to want to eat, or want to die?" cried Cinders in a rage. "The old are always hard on the young. People ought to go about in sets—the old by themselves, the middle-aged in batches, and the young together—for they all talk different languages, and they only make a Babel when they get mixed!"

"Mad as ever, Miss Cynthy," said Dinah, shaking her head, "but you mean well."

"I *hate* well-intentioned, sane people," said Cinders. "I thank God that I'm mad. It is man's duty, and more especially woman's, to be mad—not stupid, mind, but mad in the right way. The insanity that places spirit above body is the saving grace in every human being, and which lifts the world from sordidness to splendour. To be sane is to be without aspiration, without enthusiasm. The track of the saints is the record of sanity; it was the matchless Fanatic of them all who said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' It's lust of gold and greed of gain that is *real* madness, and applies a clamp to heart and brain, ensmalling both." Suddenly Cinders stopped, threw an indignant glance at Dinah's uncomprehending face, jumped up, and ascending the stairs, knocked at a door, but receiving no reply, softly turned the handle, and went in.

The first things that struck her were three plum-stones on the common deal table . . . strange that in such a desperate situation the girl could eat preserved plums . . . but tragedy lifted, and her brow cleared, as she advanced to a bed where a pale, pretty young thing with bare shoulders was sitting up, frowning at the intruder and the intrusion.

"I have brought you some violets," said Cinders, and held them up to the clouded face, then laid them down on the sheet before her. Looking round, she found a cloth jacket hanging up, and wrapping it about the girl's shoulders, fastened it securely, then sat down beside her. To talk to this poor creature about

catching cold would be about as indecent as to ask a man walking to the scaffold if the eggs for breakfast had been poached to his liking, and Cinders said nothing at all till the tears rose in the girl's blue-grey eyes, and splashed heavily down.

"Don't," she said gently, and put her hand on the one that lay on the coverlet—a hand that did not look as if it had done much hard work, nor was it that of a lady—it was, in fact, that of a lady's maid.

"You're not a parish visitor, are you?" said the girl suspiciously.

"No. I—" Cinders paused, "have a lot of spare hours, you know, and I try to help others a little. Mrs. Buckle is an old servant of our family," she went on, "and knew that I was to be trusted. Rowan—I know your name is Rowan—don't you suppose that we women ought to, and *do* stand by each other at a time like this?"

"But they don't," said the girl, with a bitter look on the soft roundness of her young face. "Miss, it was my own fault. But I loved him, and so long as I could please him, it made *me* happy to make *him* happy. I didn't care."

"He—he is kind to you?" hazarded Cinders. Already the charm had worked, and the girl was trusting her, for even a minx can recognise truth and goodness in the eyes and voice of another woman.

"They don't think, these gentlemen," said Rowan; "gentlemen don't marry ladies' maids."

"He is a scoundrel," broke out Cinders, with flashing eyes, "and I would like to tell him so to his face."

Rowan's expression changed. Her beauty was of the Greuze type, very childish, very delicate in colouring (like a peach, thought Cinders, in a man's greedy hand), and so dainty, that until she spoke she might easily have been taken to belong to an entirely different class.

"Then I hope, Miss, you two will never meet," she said, and she said it spitefully.

The further Cinders advanced, the more baffling she found the intricacies of a mind essentially cunning, obstinate, and untruthful. "You love the man?" exclaimed Cinders at last.

Rowan tossed her young, fair-brown head.

"He liked me because he thought I was young and fresh," she said sullenly, "and I don't want him to see me; it's my one mortal fear that he should find me out."

"I would like," cried Cinders, with indignant eyes, "to put such men as he in the pillory, and let their victims go free, instead of its being just the other way about. How did your mistress behave?"

"Oh, we don't tell our mistresses these things, Miss. I picked a quarrel with her and left. But I ran out of money—and—and——"

A rush of angry colour spread over Cinders' face; for the moment she was out of touch with the girl, and all her fine enthusiasm for sinners shrivelled.

"We will all help you," she said, making a gallant effort, but with intense difficulty, "both now and after."

"I don't want for anything," said Rowan. "Some one who knew father is looking after me. Father and mother are both dead, and I'm glad of it."

Cinders rose, and began slowly to draw on her gloves.

"I think you have already made *him* a promise," she said, "and now I want you to make one to me. Promise that you will never try again to do what you did yesterday, and that if at any future time you are in trouble, you will send for me."

"I won't do it again, Miss; it was silly. I shall be able to take a situation again in a couple of months. And I give you my word that if ever I want help badly, I will let you know."

"Let us understand one another," said Cinders sternly. "Do you mean to run straight when you go out into service again, or do you not?"

"Of course I do, Miss," said Rowan reluctantly, "but if he wants to see me, how can I help it? And when—" she stopped, for the ecstatic vision before her was suddenly extinguished in the blaze of her visitor's eyes. It was Cinders' way to ignore the rest, and look for the one grain of worth in a human heart, and she usually found it, but not in this instance.

Dinah observed with concern and wrath her young mistress's disturbed looks as she came slowly down the stairs.

"I don't think she will try to do it again," said Cinders, but her tone was hopeless, "and she won't hear a word against the man."

"She's young," said Dinah, "but she's sly—horses won't get the truth out of her about him. But it's always the way with a bad man, he makes women death-faithful to him, while the good one is kept dancing till he gets into his coffin."

Dinah's eye spelt the everlasting Bobbie, so Cinders said hastily—

"She seems afraid that he will find her out;" and at that moment came a man's impatient, characteristic double knock at the front door, and she jumped, for it seemed as if thinking of the sinner might have brought him hither.

"Go," said Cinders, and drew back out of sight, and the next moment she heard the door opened, and Andrew's somewhat masterful voice inquiring if a young woman named Rowan were staying there?

"Tell her that I am going abroad immediately, and must arrange several things with her before I go," he said, then walked into the sitting-room with a tread that seemed to belong less to a scoundrel than to a person who owned the whole place.

Mrs. Buckle, coming straight back, was horrified at the whiteness of Cinders' face.

"Why should you worry so, Miss Cynthy?" she said in a whisper. "I must go up and tell her; who would have thought a chit like that could get hold of such

a man?" For like most women she was ready at a minute's notice to espouse the cause of the man against her own sex, especially if his looks pleased her.

"You mean the other way round," said Cinders in a fierce aside; "it is *he* who has brains and experience enough to know better. On your peril mention my name; does the girl upstairs know it?"

"Now, don't ye always tell me not to name it?" whispered back Mrs. Buckle. "You always did insist on keeping your good deeds dark."

"Did you shut the door," inquired Cinders impatiently.

"No, I left it open for you to have a peep at him," said Mrs. Buckle almost inaudibly, but regretted the words as Cinders scowled, though in her present mood she would not have cared if she had come face to face with the man, and in her rage she might have said things to make her blush for herself to her life's end. But his back was turned to the half-open door, and he did not even turn his head as she walked out. It was instinct rather than intention that took her in the contrary direction to the window, so that when Rowan came to him presently, he was entirely ignorant of how narrowly he had escaped seeing Celia's friend.

CHAPTER VI

"Go from the east to the west, as the sun and the stars direct thee,
Go with the girdle of man, go and encompass the earth.
Not for the gain of the gold, for the getting, the hoarding, the having,
But for the joy of the deed, but for the duty to do."

ANDREW MACKENZIE sailed to South Africa on the 15th of January. Perhaps the period of sharpest anxiety in England was that which elapsed between the departure of Lords Roberts and Kitchener, and the occupying by Macdonald of Koodoe's Drift.

How could we eat, how could we drink, while our starving men were shut up in Kimberley, Ladysmith, Mafeking, dying by hundreds in pain, in hunger, in misery, all unrecking that they showed to us as heroes, that our hearts yearned over, and bled for them? And even if they had known it, they were too weak, too tired to care much; not theirs to die, sword in hand, reckless and happy, because they had fulfilled themselves, but "by the way out sideways," as poor Steevens did, musing grimly on the real side of war, the side that war correspondents are in a conspiracy to hide, the side that never gets into print; that is known only to those who die realising it, and who send no message to us from the other side to tell us the truth.

In those dark, endless days of unbearable suspense, of revulsion, of hope and fear,—fear, when one's hand trembled as one opened a paper, and the news of the fall of one or all of the three devoted garrisons was hourly expected—men's faces became set like stone, and women's grew old and seared, and in many of them the youth went out for ever. Some went mad, and others died, but none were ever quite the same again, or able to play on the surface of life; they had gone sheer down to elemental things, and bore the marks to their graves. And those who could weep were lined the less, but there was a great sternness in many women's hearts just then, that denied them the relief of tears.

Chill was the wintry sky; the clothing of those abroad was mainly black, the streets were sunless, the crowds walked silent and preoccupied; no one cried out, no one complained. It was the waiting that took the heart out of the people, who could not occupy themselves while they waited, with an ever-present, dull, sickening fear—fear for the besieged, not for the issue of the war.

The only life in the streets came from the army on its way to lose it. The roll of the drum never ceased, the bugle-call shrilled out clear, the tramp, tramp of countless young, eager feet approached from every quarter of the earth, and there pressed into the ranks the sons of the Empire, mostly with boyish, resolute faces, and all meant business. They passed from our

gaze to the sound of music; they went to hardship and maddening thirst, for the most part to be mown down like ripe corn, and along the streets ran a stifled ripple of mothers' quiet weeping.

For all this pomp and fanfaronade of war, what does it narrow itself down to? *One* life that the darkness swallows up, that we strain our eyes to watch for from afar off, not knowing if it will ever emerge out of the obscurity that hides it from us.

There were no class distinctions in those days of waiting, when men and women asked each other for news, stood shoulder to shoulder, eye to eye in the street, united in one common bond of suffering, of endurance, the beggar and the aristocrat, the same sorrow paling the cheek, the same pride in our men flashing fierily in the eye. Oh, it was not all loss! There was some gain in this agony that knit together as brothers and sisters the whole English-speaking race throughout the world! And many a frivolous woman put paint, and powder, and intrigue for ever away from her at that time, and many a careless man's heart stiffened into goodness and steadfast resolve, for war encourages all that is best in a man, and brings out the difference between right and wrong which is smothered up in him by times of peace.

G. F. Watts exclaims: "The splendid heroism of our soldiers, the magnificent heroism shown in the national calm under reverse and humiliation, and the profoundly affecting heroism of those who, without

being called, and without hope of reward, risk and give their lives to save the lives of others, make a magnificent book of the history of England—the British nation—a book the like of which could never before have been written."

Yes! war is a great purifier, for it sends a wave of cleansing emotions through us, of sympathy, of self-denial, of love; we go back to the natural, and in finding ourselves, are ashamed of what we once have been.

And all the while the dear old Mother Queen sat vigilant in her watch-tower, neglecting no single care of State while she mourned for her "boys," heartening and encouraging by her example all the other women of England, and the unity of thought and heart between her and her people, all attuned to the right note of heroism and endurance, afforded a shining and beautiful example such as has never surely before been witnessed in the history of the world.

The round of pleasure usually pursued by the gay and independent of the city was not even thought of, and if one wished to prove that 'tis not Love nor woman, but

> "'Tis man, 'tis man, 'tis man
> That makes the world go round,"

one had only to look at the manless streets — enter the shops in which trade was paralysed, walk past the unused and empty clubs, behold Piccadilly and Bond

Street a desert. For everywhere, from palace and mart and office had poured, mad to go and fight, even elderly men, in whom routine should have stifled every breath of adventure, though if anything could prove the real chafing restlessness that seethes under men's artificial life in towns, it would be their eagerness to free themselves at any cost from the restraints of it. And indeed, in most men's hearts is the healthy, mediæval desire—

> "The castle for their stormy life,
> The cloister for its close."

Cinders got into a way of reading and collecting Tommy's letters from the front, and often she would sit and laugh, and weep, over simple instances of Tommy's kindness, pluck, and endurance, and she was delighted when (for Tommy is a soldier and a gentleman) he would not part with the chocolate-box sent by the Queen. When asked to sell it, he merely treated the question with silent contempt, but when one of the Buffs was offered two pounds for his, though two pounds is a vast sum in the way of comfort and refreshment, his hesitation was barely perceptible.

"I'm sending it 'ome," said our Buff. "I promised the ole woman (he was a Reservist). 'Taint because I couldn't do with the blimey thick 'uns, an'—no, it's the ole Lady's gift, an' I might be buried without gittin' a medal, and I've got this, an' any'ow, guv'nor, hopin' there's no offence, I'll send it home."

Probably he thought of her, for all her brave, kind words, "I wish you all a bright and happy New Year. God bless you!" with the tears running down her dear old face, as they often did for "my poor boys."

But perhaps what moved Cinders most, was Tommy's sublime unconsciousness of doing anything out of the common, or that any one was proud of him over here, and if he begged for a newspaper to be sent out to him, it was not that he expected to see anything about himself in it, but because he wanted to know how the war wagged next door to him in Africa. Newspapers and tobacco—he pined for these even more than for the tobacco that was food and drink to him, and as trains moved slowly through the country, at every isolated little camp stood a man with a stick, and on it inscribed "Please give us a newspaper!" And those who were lucky enough to have any, threw them out of their cattle trucks as they passed.

And elsewhere men were almost as eager, for a shipwrecked captain brought ashore by the rocket apparatus in a raging storm, his brig gone, his crew drowned, himself more dead than alive, on being hauled ashore clamoured only for news of the war!

Cinders's gay philosophy partly failed her, and she grew white and thin, for she ate little, and slept badly. It seemed horrible to be sitting there, with all that useless food before her, and our poor chaps recovering from their wounds only to die of weakness for want of food and comforts, and who could drink in

peace, thinking of how, in their agony of thirst, men would rush at a water-cart under a deadly fire from the enemy, and drop like flies, mostly before they had got the drink for which they reckoned their lives a good exchange?

Celia was not distressed by any such thoughts, and though "Come and sit beside me, sorrow, sister sorrow" was her cry in those days (only it was upon Cinders she called), it is a fact that no person can be long unhappy who is intensely interested in himself, and naturally knows his own perfections and worth in a way no other person ever can. It is only when we are out of conceit with ourselves that our tempers are really unbearable, and sorrow presently gave way before a new shade of wild hyacinth blue that became the fashion, and promptly arrested her attention.

It was a colour that made one half of the women look like painted hags in a strong electric light, and the other half hard and frost-bitten, but it suited her hair and skin to perfection, deepening the blue of her eyes, and making her altogether lovely, and this raised her spirits wonderfully while Cinders became more irritable daily. She had at all times a frightfully dangerous temper, that would leap out on its victim with a sudden rapier thrust; it sometimes even confounded herself, though there was usually some deeper reason for it than mere anger or wounded feeling. The fierce sense of justice that made her appear hard, the instinct of truth that made her difficult in a gay world,

the sense that leaped to the true and beautiful, and shrank from the base and the sordid in life, made her at times an extremely hard nut to crack even to the few who really understood her.

"You don't care!" she cried passionately to Celia one afternoon, late in February. "You don't care. The artificial life you lead has schooled you to an atrophy of heart, and mind, and soul, with the result that you are incapable of emotion, or of realising what is happening thousands of miles away. It is merely a tragedy written in parts for your careless consideration; you are interested only in the fortunes of the one atom in it essential to your own happiness, and you mistake brutish callousness for heroic stoicism. You have never even glimpsed the sweet uses of sorrow, the joys of melancholy! You know the sadness of joy, but you will lose your feminity because you have lost the power to suffer, and you must suffer before you are able to feel."

"Haven't I shed tears enough over Andrew's letters?" cried Celia indignantly (and very true and manly they were, Cinders thought). "Do you want me to *stand* up and weep? How furious Andrew would be if he could hear you! Not that he would be surprised at any ill-bred thing you might say or do!"

Cinders laughed.

To put your hands behind your back and refuse to shake hands, or wish good luck to a person probably going straight to be killed, is something rather more or less than the ill-breeding of an outsider.

"He said he had enjoyed your frank *gaminerie*, thought you like the right sort of boy, in fact, and he found you only a rude, underbred girl."

"I rank sincerity as the first of the virtues," said Cinders briefly, "and in his heart so does he."

"But your eyes need not spit flame because you are brutally plain-spoken," said Celia, shifting the satin cushions under her head to a more luxurious angle. "You think yourself clever, my dear, but as regards the handling of men you are a perfect fool. I was surprised at his even noticing you, for Andrew never seemed to *see* another woman when I was by!"

"I wouldn't bet on any man," said Cinders coolly. "Probably ever so many women are bewailing his departure at this moment."

Celia stared. Intellectual she was not, but she had prehensile instinct concerning all persons, things and matters relating to herself, on which her grasp instantly closed, and these were now aroused.

"So *you* admire Andrew too," she said sharply. "All women do; which accounts for your shirtiness when he only remembered you sufficiently to want to wish you good-bye."

"Of course I am madly in love with him," said Cinders; "that is the sole reason why I put my hands behind my back. 'Touch not, taste not, handle not,' you know!"

She was sitting in her favourite attitude on the rug before the fire, both arms fast locked round her knees,

and eyes that studied the human faces, beautiful or grotesque, into which the red-hot coals shaped themselves, and somehow in her unconsciousness and absorption she suggested the picture of Bret Harte's sinful, glorious M'liss. But if in the unsatisfactory state of her affairs M'liss was yet able to meditate on the goodness of man, Cinders was doing precisely the reverse, and she was wondering if the rule of conduct Andrew had applied to Rowan might apply to other women—even to Celia. Andrew was an artist, and as such, might mentally require a reduplication of instances, his intense susceptibility to physical loveliness almost compelling him to pass from type to type.

Then something that she had read lately recurred to her, as to keen intelligences apposite things will.

"Is it to be supposed that the sensuousness that is needed for art only becomes a power for beauty when it has been turned into sensuality? The wish to be wicked is the poet's reaction . . . it is natural that the rainbow spinner who has been up to heaven should demand the satisfaction of the animal."

Celia would shrug her shoulders and laugh, if she were told of Rowan, and to use her own words, regard Andrew as so infinitely more interesting if she knew it! It was her secret leaning towards a rake that gave George Arundel his influence over her mind, in spite of her very real love for Andrew. It was not of *her* Cinders was thinking, but of how up to now no single man she knew had won her entire respect and homage.

And already Rowan had passed out of Cinders's observation, probably for ever. On the very morning following that visit to the house had come a letter from Dinah.

"Dear Miss Cynthy," it ran. "I told you she was a Minx. She ran away before I was up this morning. She seemed mortal afraid of the gentleman coming again.—Yours dutifully, DINAH."

"Hark!" exclaimed Cinders suddenly. "There's a motor-car at your door—a well-bred one, too, that doesn't bubble and hiss, like a steam-kettle trimmed with paraffin."

"It must be Lucilla Beauclerk, probably come to howl about her Archie," said Celia crossly, as Cinders sprang up, and looked out.

Already the crowd that draws round any new thing, wildly hoping that it may be dangerous to life and limb, had imperceptibly formed to gaze at the handsome, compact vehicle weighing nineteen hundredweight, and capable of allowing a speed of twenty-four miles an hour. It had pneumatic tyres, and the car was painted a very neat dark-green, picked out with black. A smart groom in livery to match was assisting his mistress to alight, and any one who looked less like howling than Lucilla Beauclerk at that moment was not to be imagined.

"I'll try to switch some of her impertinences on to you; perhaps with your sharp tongue you may be able to hold your own with her—*I* can't!" exclaimed Celia, and at that moment the door was thrown open, and Mrs. Beauclerk announced.

CHAPTER VII

"There are cases in which the blade springs, but the plant does not go on to flower. There are cases where it flowers, but no fruit is subsequently produced."

A THOUGHTFUL man once said of Mrs. Beauclerk that he never could be quite sure if she were a fool playing at being a clever woman, or a clever woman playing at being a fool. The fair Chauffeuse came swimming into the room in a long coat of fine grey cloth, impermeable to dust, stitched to form a yoke, and again stitched from the yoke downwards with trefoil embroideries where the pleats were allowed to fall free about her slender figure, and just brushed Celia's cheek with her own before she sank into a couch.

"My dear child, we haven't met for ages. Will you toc-toc with me this afternoon? I learnt in Paris, you know; it's quite safe. Who is this?" and she looked at Cinders, whose tell-tale brows, drawn together in close scrutiny in the effort to classify her correctly, suddenly and charmingly relaxed in a vivid smile of welcome, and the two women's eyes met, and said all that was true—and it is sincerity that forms the basis of life, yes, and half the beauty of it—and like most

women of fine nature, Cinders genuinely liked her own sex.

"It is Miss Devon; I thought you had met," said Celia aloud, but to herself murmured, "By their sleeves shall ye know them," as her eager eyes took in the wonderful coat, the neat hat, the perfection in every detail of her aunt's costume. With some few women their garments seem to fit not only their own bodies, but the eyes of the beholder, and at all times Mrs. Beauclerk was a dainty creature who somehow always looked as if the sordidness of life could never touch her. And between the two women there was a real envy, because the younger was the genuine fool that the elder, for her own happiness' sake, desired to be, while Celia, for all her beauty, lacked the enormous *cachet* possessed by Lucilla. Yet there was a want in her face. When you saw her beside a perfectly happy, but atrociously dressed woman, you noted it more, that her toilette was exquisitely complete, but she herself was not.

"What news have you of Archie?" inquired Celia in a tone that implied it was exactly like her frivolous aunt, with her only son at the front, to go off to Paris to toc-toc, and reappear *point device* when all the other mothers' frocks and faces were indecipherable through misery.

"He writes me in the best of spirits," said Mrs. Beauclerk negligently. "You never read, I know," embracing in one comprehensive glance the barren-

ness of heart and brain culture that pervaded all the richly-coloured room. (Celia's cushions always matched her frock; she went in for backgrounds exclusively.) "Some of his letters are very amusing. He wrote me from Cape Town that he didn't know much about such matters, but he thought the behaviour of the ladies at the Mount Nelson Hotel the very height of indelicate good form. And he could only conclude it was the climate! If he gets into hospital he is going to put up over his bed, 'I am too ill to be nursed.'"

She had turned to Cinders as to something alive. How can one converse with an exquisitely decorated wall?

"I always look in the paper for Archie's name," said Celia, with the persistency of the dull, cruel person who cannot feel a goad in his hand without using it.

"You brute," muttered Cinders fiercely to herself. "When you know that it means death, or being wounded, to be there at all."

"His regiment has been in some awfully tight places lately," said Celia. "No regiment seems to have seen more fighting. Is it true that only half the men and a third of the officers are left? Archie ought to get rapid promotion. It's the wastage that kills more than the fighting, you know—enteric, and so on."

For a brief moment there came into Mrs. Beauclerk's eyes the fierce mother-light that is swifter than lightning, stronger than death, then she said coldly—

"The boy is following his profession—why talk so much about it? There's far too much rubbish in newspapers about sympathy with mothers, and so forth. We only want people's condolence when our sons *don't* do their duty. He has grown a beard," she said, turning to Cinders with a smile, "and I have begged him to save it up to make a *toupée* for my old age!"

"You have pluck, you women of the world," thought Cinders.

"But you have not inquired for my husband," said Lucilla, and spoke charmingly of him as usual; and if to do everything at exactly the right moment, and in exactly the right way, is to be well-bred, then was Lucilla a very well-bred woman indeed.

Celia was not interested. She did not like clever men, especially when they did not like her.

"You are thinner," she said, measuring Mrs. Beauclerk's fine lengths enviously.

"Yes. Thank Heaven, I still belong to the brigade of 'Laps.' Figures are divided into two classes—Laps, and no Laps."

Cinders laughed, and noted the restful grace of Mrs. Beauclerk's hands, loosely folded on her knees; for herself she could never sit with folded hands, life was far too short.

"And my dear Andrew," said Mrs. Beauclerk presently, "I see that he, too, has gone out. I have heard the gossip about you two, and hope it is not true.

For Andrew is getting on, you know, and very young husbands, and very young coachmen, are the fashion."

"Really," said Celia drily, "it is very kind of you to take so much interest in my affairs. I might have been dead all these months for anything you cared."

"Oh, my dear! you would have let every one know," said Mrs. Beauclerk negligently, "through your admirers and the *Morning Post*, and been on view in a low-necked, short-sleeved shroud of *peau de soie* surrounded by a *fourreau* of flowers, like the girl in John Collier's picture, and you would have raised Cain if the wrong coloured roses had been twined round your hair in the wrong way!"

The corners of Cinders' mouth trembled, and those flexible brows of hers (making Celia's arches look insipid) went up, but she loyally kept back the answering flash of intelligence. Nevertheless, Celia saw, and coloured angrily.

"And you had your dressmaker, my dear!" went on her nimble adversary, "and your fashion plates, and men, and so on"—she glanced round the room, and sighed, for Celia would not always be a fresh young beauty, and what resources would she have in her inevitable old age? In this Sleepy Hollow men were wont, with a great sense of rest, to sink down into her downy chairs, and send their intellects a-begging while their bodies were steeped in luxurious enjoyment.

"And I was down at Beauclerk for Christmas, you know."

"And, of course, you never trouble about clothes yourself," said Celia drily. "If your best friend got to heaven, you would want to know whether St. Peter admired hér, or if down below, whether she had remembered to put on a silk tea-gown instead of a woollen one!"

Lucilla closed her eyes as if Celia's attempt at wit hurt her.

"Archie always likes me to look smart," she said. "But really, I do feel responsible for Andrew," she went on, and she spoke his name as one who loved it, "for was it not I who introduced him to you?" And she sighed again. "Did he leave any pictures ready for the spring shows?"

"I really don't know," said Celia sulkily. "To me, there's something wanting in Andrew's pictures—like a hat that you know in an instant is wrong, though shape and trimming seem all right; only sometimes a hat, atrocious at one angle, is all right at another. I've produced surprising results before now in wearing hats hinder part before, but you can't turn Andrew's landscapes about like that!"

"He has not the *feu sacré*, I admit," said Mrs. Beauclerk reluctantly (one is always surprised when a human doll, instead of merely squeaking, says something true), "but he has not the tendency of our landscape painters to strive after illusion, and thus disguise, instead of making their art a personal expression of the beautiful, as Andrew does. He has a poet's soul,

and he puts all the feeling and romance of his life into his pictures."

"Tries to," said Celia cruelly. "When a Scotchman paints a picture, all the other Scotchmen in town go to see it, and if it has the smallest pretensions to worth, they buy it. The way the Scotch stand by one another is extraordinary; you seldom or never see one of them fail in any profession he enters. Andrew had a far greater career before him at the bar, where his brains and eloquence told, and was a fool to leave it for one in which he will never be really distinguished."

"Has not a man a right to his own happiness—especially when he can afford it?" said Mrs. Beauclerk drily. "If you really loved him, you would rejoice at the intense pleasure his art gives him, and not mind in the least that he doesn't make other people happy."

"I don't ask him to be a universal provider of happiness," said Celia coldly, "but I expect him to secure mine."

Mrs. Beauclerk sighed. It is not possible to drive a tin tack into enamel. And "no creature smarts so little as a fool." "But why marry," she said, and put her head on one side in the silly way that had done so much to earn her a reputation for folly. "Don't forget that the more charming the man is, the more trouble you'll have to keep him; if you want peace, annex a good second-rate creature, and put up with him! The one will be a comfortable feather-bed in

cold weather, the other an airy, fairy palace of delights, full of draughts, dungeons, and trap-doors."

Cinders laughed; and Mrs. Beauclerk turned quickly, and smiled as at something alive in a gallery of images.

"Ah! my dear," she said, "don't *you* be in a hurry! Half the unhappy marriages are caused by girls being so hasty—perhaps because they don't like the shape of a parent's nose; and one day they fly to a strange, and still more unsatisfactory nose, and take it to their bosoms for ever! Remember that every year after twenty is worth a hundred in experience to a woman."

"And so much lost from her freshness and complexion," said Celia, as a feline will pounce on a dog tied up by a string. "A lumbering girl cut out Josephine in Napoleon's affections because her complexion, hair, and teeth were her own, and Josephine's were not."

Cinders laughed out suddenly, and Mrs. Beauclerk joined in.

"Ah, my dear, how refreshingly spiteful that was! And yet I am not sure that you are right. To-day witnesses the exit of youth, and enter the woman of fifty! If only her hair is her own—all a-growing and a-blowing, and doesn't come off when she woos male sweet-and-twenty—she is more than a match for a pretty, inexperienced girl. Nowadays we *marry* our best friends' babies before they have time to breech them!"

Celia laughed, for this was quite in her line. With her, spite took the place of wit, and indeed with an empty-headed world it often passes as such.

"Well," said Mrs. Beauclerk, "I'll admit that I adore youth. The young people banded together (I love their casual ways) can do anything. Just think of their youth, their enthusiasms, their spirits, their cocksureness; if they could *see* it all as the old do, they would never do anything. You are welcome to your youth, and your hair, and your complexion, but I'll admit I envy you Andrew; with lovers, quality, not quantity, is everything! But don't you think that a woman has age on the brain; she begins to count the minute her hair is up, and if she is charming at seventy, what has age got to do with her individuality? She should leave it to the man to advance reasons for not loving her, but she insists on finding them for him, and isn't happy till she has driven him away by her arguments."

"It's better to be dead than ridiculous," said Celia the obtuse.

Lucilla laughed again. She always enjoyed herself with Celia.

"But why Andrew?" she persisted. "An artist does not make a good lover; it is the man who prefers the study of human nature who is the most satisfactory. Because if you are a true artist, nature will always hold you faster than human nature, and so you get called ungrateful, heartless—unfaithful."

"How vastly becoming that shade of blue is to you," and what a comfort it must be," she went on in her curiously detached, irresponsible way, as though she and sense had not so much parted, as never met. "Only you'll want some man to admire it; and that is the worst of us poor women—we are so unselfish, we can't keep all our good things to ourselves!"

As she stood up to go, the resemblance between herself and niece, both graceful, fair, and long-limbed, was very apparent, though their eyes, equally blue, were strikingly different, and perhaps the spirit that looks out of one's eyes is about the only thing one can call one's own, for generations of ancestors may have stamped a jaw or features upon us that our tastes and tendencies flatly contradict.

"Will *you* come a-moting with me, Miss Devon? Though really it's not much fun here. Now in Paris we go helter-skelter, and cut our corners sharp. It isn't healthy to take much walking exercise over there just now! There used to be only one Dead Man's Corner, but now there are several. We run the folks down, and don't stop to pick 'em up."

"Not to-day—I'm not smart enough. I must live up to your reputation, you know!"

"To-morrow?" said Mrs. Beauclerk, lingering, fascinated by the girl's expression. "If so, be in Berkeley Square at eleven," and she named the number.

Cinders promised.

"Why doesn't Beau go out with you on your car?" said Celia the spiteful.

"Heavens! I shouldn't dare," exclaimed Lucilla, throwing her a reproachful glance; "why, all the other women would be as shocked as if—" she paused, and shrugged her shoulders. It would be the subversion of all order and decency! "Besides, he is always at his books. He has thrown himself heart and soul into study, and natural science."

"Any company but his wife's," murmured Celia half-audibly. "And how trying for you, who take more interest in hearts than facts!" she maliciously concluded.

"Sir George Arundel," announced a servant.

Mrs. Beauclerk paused, and nodded, without holding out her hand to the man who was coming in. His was the sunny-haired, blue-eyed beauty of a young god, but though the features were straight, and extremely handsome, his eyes, to the initiated, gave him away.

"Why have you not gone out?" said Mrs. Beauclerk abruptly. "It is a positive disgrace to a man to be in England to-day."

He shrugged his shoulders. The great wave of patriotism that had swept half the men of England to the front had not invaded the dry ground on which he stood.

"I am neither a Duke's son, nor a cook's son—as far as I know," he said lightly, with his eyes fixed on Cinders, who ignored him, and his expression was

charming when he smiled. "I am not deeply in debt to my tailor, and the bookies would not need to eagerly scan the lists of killed for my name."

Mrs. Beauclerk frowned as she passed out with Cinders. Perhaps a man's failure in physical bravery touches womanhood on the raw more than all his other failures put together.

"How beautiful you are," he murmured, as the door closed, and he took Celia's hand; and indeed, in her trailing hyacinth robes she was a vision of loveliness, and might have quickened the pulse of any man save himself. But instead, he was thinking of that insolent little devil they called Cinders, who had passed him without recognition, whose eyes had always frankly saluted him as "Beast," and who owned a dictionary of her own editing for what other women called his fascination and charm. And he would have rejoiced to see the flint-red spark of those brown eyes extinguished in tears or—love. He did not want Celia himself, but Mackenzie did, and he had an old score against the latter, not to mention an entirely new one, and a man will sacrifice a lot to cut out his enemy, and break his heart, so he meant to compromise Celia and lose her Mackenzie, but had no intention whatever of marrying her himself.

No one could be more gentle, more sympathetic on occasion than Arundel, and now he took suave and easy possession of Celia's mood, very much to its advantage, for the cypher of most women's minds was

easy to him as print, and Celia's was not profound. At the moment she was angry at the instant *rapprochement* between Cinders and Mrs. Beauclerk, and in the mood to defy Andrew's injunctions about George Arundel.

She was beginning, too, to feel forlorn, loverless, as one about whom no spicy airs of courtship blew, no warm west winds of love encompassed, and after all, woman mostly is a chameleon upon whom man throws the colours; if there are none, dull drab is her life, and in time her looks come to match her life, and a thousand pretty airs and graces bloom ridiculous if unheeded. And the evenings just then were terrible to Celia, as she had never in her life gone out without a man to take care of her, and she did not mean to begin it now.

So that when he suggested a little dinner and a play (of course she would bring Cinders), she not only consented, but those little dinners and plays became more frequent as time went on.

CHAPTER VIII

"The world loves vice, and hates love. Vice is a good fellow, a free liver, a drôle, a gourmet; he keeps a good table, and invites you to it often. Love, on the contrary, is a pedant, a solitary person, a misanthrope who goes barefoot; he does not amuse you, and quickly you cry, '*À la lanterne!*'"

"WHO is the *espiègle* little girl with the eyebrows and the laughing mouth?" said a man to a very pretty woman at a table at Claridge's, in a pause of the talk of war, war, and a brief cessation of war music.

"That? The Schilizzi's cousin."

"H'm. The fair Celia is not so wise in her choice of friends as usual."

"The girl is no beauty, though of course she has heaps of *chien*."

"No; something better. There's heart and fire in that face, though she looks as if she didn't care a damn for anybody."

"Arundel seems to think so too. What is his little game—with Celia, I mean?"

A look of disgust crossed the man's features as he glanced at Arundel.

"A man like that is a disgrace to civilisation, and ought to be stamped out," he said. "He is of the old type, and will devote to the capture of a woman sleep-

less energy, enormous strategical skill, the will, the staying power, the daring of a great general. With mine and countermine and ambuscade—taking one entrenchment by storm, and another by treachery—I should say he would be more than a match for the most experienced woman alive, let alone that bright little girl yonder."

"But who would look at her with Celia by?" objected the woman. "He is doing it to spite Mackenzie; but Celia knows the ropes, and she is fond of Andrew."

"When he is there."

The woman gave Celia one of those long, close looks of scrutiny that is the full and exceeding reward of the scrutinised, then said slowly—

"I honestly believe she is the loveliest and best-turned-out woman in all London."

"And the stupidest. Now, if there were a soul behind those blue eyes; you are much nicer," he added in a low voice; for if there *is* a thing that genuinely pleases a man, it is to hear one pretty woman praise another.

"Dear boy," she said, and her voice trembled a little, for he was off to the front next day (not a man present save Arundel but was going, or trying to go), and his departure would create a little wilderness for her, such as many another woman had to stand in at that time.

"Why didn't Arundel go?" said the woman, pluckily hiding her pain. Women were as brave as men, and braver, in those awful days.

"A man who makes war on women is the last person to risk his own life, and try to take his enemy's, in fair fight."

"But steeplechasing is far more dangerous than fighting!" she cried. "The entire field went over Kliply the other day; tore every shred of clothes off him; and his whole body is encased in plaster of Paris at this moment!"

"The brute can ride," admitted the man, who was himself of the clean, thoroughbred type, though not without the faults of his class; "it's the only saving virtue about him—but it's more nerve than courage, with the same brutal desire of mastery over horses as he has over women. And he treats his horses worse if anything. I would not have his record for something. By rights his memory should be a charnel-house, but he has turned it into a blooming conservatory! I hope that little girl"—he paused, and looked with concern at Cinders' eager face—"won't be one of the flowers he plants in it. Mrs. Schilizzi can take care of herself. I——"

Then he abruptly changed the conversation.

"I wonder when I shall get as good a dinner as this again?"

He drew from his note-book a cutting, and read it aloud to her. It was the *menu* of a dinner given on 1st March, at the Claremont Medical and Surgical Sanatorium, South Africa.

REMEMBER MAJUBA, BOYS.

SANATORIUM, *1st March* 1900.

MENU. DINNER.

HORS D'ŒUVRE.
Cronje on toast.

POTAGE.
Bobs' Dip Modder-ated.

POISSON.
Tugela Salmon and White's Sauce.

ENTRÉES.
Boer's Tongue à la Redvers Buller.
Kidneys à la Kruger.

RELEVÉ.
Steyn stuffed with Lyddite.

RÔTI.
Old English Sirloin à la Victoria.

LÉGUMES.
Free State and Transvaal Aardapels.
Shrapnels.

ENTREMETS.
Kitchener's Pudding with Tommy Sauce.
Ladysmith's Fingers.

ICE.
Pretoria taken coolly.
Bread, Gems.

SAVOURY.
Union Jack "Tar."
Butter, Jam.

Dutch Coffee.'"

"Anyway," she said, "the coffee will be all right! What a joke it is Oom Paul taking all the money he can lay his hands on, and forgetting to bring along his Old Dutch!"

Arundel's keen, careless eyes hardly left Cinders, who sat with head erect, throat and shoulders characteristic as her features, in a soft, black gown with quaint lapels of old lace falling back from a skin that gleamed with the flawless sheen and texture of youth's own especial white satin.

It seemed to Celia, looking away from the exquisite green and grey of her own reflection, a bouquet of lilies of the valley with their delicate leaves comprising the chief feature of her corsage, that she suddenly saw Cinders as if she were a complete stranger, a striking study in black and white, with two vivid splashes of colour only about her, the scarlet of the cloak on her chair, and her mouth. It was a ripe, scarlet mouth, full of character, the upper lip a narrow bow curling up at the corners, the lower rather full and cherry-like, showing a line of dazzling white, and Andrew's remark recurred to Celia disagreeably as she saw Arundel's eyes again and again recurring to it.

Supposing that Arundel fell really in love with this mercurial chit, whose plainness (as Celia reckoned it) lit up on occasion into something not unlike beauty—in any case one of quite extraordinary fascination? And at night the beauty of her skin told.

She needed no champagne, and drank none, but her eyes danced, her heart sang, the better war news rose to her head and intoxicated her, and in the warmth of her rejoicing she drew Arundel into her own orbit of happiness, and treated him as a comrade, and (for he was at

his best and kindest) even felt that she had been unjust to him. Why do we, one and all, so constantly change front? Why was she changing hers?

Because our imaginations and our eyes don't tally; because we think horrors of a person, then are disarmed by his gentleness, or personal appearance; we idolise another, and are set on edge by some personal peculiarity forgotten in absence, and that is why we are so inconsistent and so natural. And people often get false characters, good and bad.

Thus it befel that there came about a very queer state of things in Cinders' mind, but one common enough to women who, on being bitterly disappointed in a man whom they had thought good, straightway find goodness in some man whom hitherto they had believed to be compounded solely of evil. It is part of that levelling up, or levelling down process (which you will) that gradually and, alas, in later life, reduces all vices and virtues to *chiar-oscuro*.

Meanwhile Celia was saying to herself that there is something decidedly vulgar in intense *joie de vivre*, or indeed intense anything. She hated vivid colours, thought sunsets after Turner quite indecent, found certain flowers screamingly bad form, and would close her eyes at sharp effects of light and shade as if they positively hurt her. She was also blind to the pleasures of fooling—such fooling as makes people merrier and therefore happier creatures. The person who will guide your steps out of the beaten track of tragedy into the

side-walks of laughter, and who may be traced all the way along by the smiles and lightened hearts that follow his progress, is really so much captured sunshine warming a dull world, and stolen from that sun in the heavens whence flows fructification, and beauty, and love.

And if Arundel's passions had been the extinguisher to put the light out in many women's souls, it struck him that some other man had toughened in Cinders the resistant moral fibre that made her so mettlesome, and worthy of his own accomplished steel. And presently, for his finger was for ever on the pulse of his sensations, he found himself wondering if the first sign of age was upon him, if he were fast coming to that time of life when he could not admire beauty without intellect, any more than intellect without personal charm of one kind or another attracted him. It was Cinders' changing face of course that set him thinking, and especially her eyes, for there was something very sporting about her, and the rule that what a man wanted very badly on a Monday he would probably not want at all on a Thursday, might not apply to her. (With Arundel the woman he happened to want was the one exception to the whole sex.)

Cinders' eyes were the soul of her—these, and the extraordinary flexibility of her slender eyebrows that made all other faces look sleepy beside her; so that one seldom got further, and either did not see, or forgot the rest of her face.

But Arundel had long ago preferred her lips to her eyes—lips striking in the healthy white-rose of the girl's skin, for they were the exact tint of a moss-cup, the only true carmine matched in nature by human nature, and beside that colour and the white satin of Cinders' skin, Celia's colouring showed to him like red japonica, wax-like, hard, and cold.

Arundel hated straw-coloured, straight hair, and here indeed he hit the only blot in Celia's beauty, for wave and curl it as her maid might, it did not weave a curly, lovely web on her temples and into the nape of her neck as Cinders' brown hair did.

And at the "Messenger Boy" things did not improve. Celia decided that in future she would bring Alix, who by falling madly in love with Arundel, had naturally entirely disqualified herself for his consideration.

Celia saw nothing to laugh at when a cosy, blue-eyed, delicious fool, crossing her legs, displayed to the knee a red and white tartan stocking of enormous pattern, at which the house yelled with delight, and even Eddy Payne, looking down his nose while he performed a skirt-dance and thievish juggling tricks, left her quite unpurified by the cleansing effects of honest laughter.

Afterwards, at supper at Romano's, Cinders enjoyed the music and surroundings with quite unimpaired freshness and spirits, though going home Celia got in her little scratch.

"I thought you *hated* George Arundel?" she said,

and for a moment Cinders pulled up, and the faint perfume of Russian violets exhaled by Celia, and so hated by Andrew, somehow suggested funeral rites, performed on his love and memory.

"Oh!" said Cinders,

> "'When my heart with pleasure fills,
> It dances with the daffodils,'

and if people get into the line of battle, I can't stop being happy just to quarrel with them! I sponge the slate clean of everything, and enjoy myself for all I'm worth.

> 'Work while you work
> And play while you play,'

which means, boil up your sorrows in one good howl, and all the pleasures you can scrape together in one good bust up. Good-night! The sooner you begin to howl and bust up the better!"

But later, before her looking-glass, Cinders, appalled at the dimensions of the roused devil looking at her out of her own brilliant eyes, exclaimed—

"What! You are on speaking terms already with *his* devil—want to meet him, and try conclusions with him?"

She put her hand over her eyes to hide them, but the fire, and provocation and wickedness of them would not be hidden, they frightened her again, and as she took her hands away, the wonderful colour of her mouth struck her.

"One day it will not be red," she said, "and the fire will be out of your spirit; and you will not be able to please a man, or fight him, and he will go elsewhere. For a man, even Bobbie, loves me to please himself—not me: my mind, my spirit may be glorious, but if my teeth stick out, or I have a wide parting, he will look the other way! Meanwhile"—and she made a low bow to the one bosom friend who never contradicted or annoyed her, and to whom she confided her very inmost thoughts, whether they were respectable or whether they weren't—"I may tell you that my intentions towards Celia are strictly dishonourable, for I'm going to flirt with George Arundel. I promised *him*—and he isn't worth it, but I promised."

She summoned up Andrew's face before her, and searched it for signs of moral disintegration, but the fine, clean-shaven, slightly ironical features looked straight back at her, and denied her right to despise him.

"For Celia is just in the mood for diversion," she said confidentially. "Well, I mean to divert Arundel."

CHAPTER IX

"To tell you true, I walk because I die,
Out of my calling in a tragedy,
O poet, damned dull poet, who could prove
So senseless to make Nelly die by love?"

CELIA felt justly indignant at Mrs. Beauclerk's absorbing so much of Cinders' time, that in a hundred ways had hitherto been at her disposal. It was irritating to receive a negligent wave of Cinders' hand as she flashed past her in Bond Street, almost as smart as the Chauffeuse by whose side she sat, and on the invariable principle that two pretty women together get stared at as Venus herself would not if she appeared alone, Celia felt that she had been a fool not to accept the invitation to toc-toc that, by refusing, she had passed on to another.

And Cinders, thorough sportswoman as she was in all her tastes, and who had started with so healthy a hatred of motor-cars and all their works, that she had vowed she would not even go to her own funeral in one, found in Mrs. Beauclerk a new interest in life, compelling her almost equal admiration for, and disapproval of, a type of woman whom she had not only never before met, but would have deemed impossible had she not known it.

"How dare she talk to me! She never was a mother. *You* might be, but she *couldn't*. Let her marry a barber's block, and breed blocks," Mrs. Beauclerk had cried like a whirlwind as she clutched Cinders' hand going downstairs on the first occasion of meeting her.

And in that illuminating burst of candour (and there is a moral contagion of sympathy and intellect, as of good and evil), the two had become friends, and Cinders got a revelation of how a thoroughbred behaves under severe punishment, realised the daily, hourly pluck a mother has to practise in these days lest she go under, and become a curse and a weariness to all about her. And Cinders' own courage rose high to help this sister woman, who omitted no decency of life, while she lived only in those lightning moments when her eye ran down the list of killed and wounded with the unconscious brutality that passed a boy's name by as nothing, because it was not *the* name, and thanked God breathlessly for one more day's respite.

Those cheery, rollicking letters that came at uncertain intervals from Archie, reckoning hunger, heat, thirst, and excessive fatigue as mere incidents in the day's work, were precious indeed, but unimportant as regarded real news of him; *that* would be in the papers, the greatest general and the humblest Tommy being alike in this, that to those at home their extinction would be announced with equal swiftness. That morning paper in every home . . . how all are in a con-

spiracy to see it first, and to break the bad news to the others . . . poor paterfamilias stealing down in dressing-gown and slippers finds his daughter there before him, and their hands shake as they turn the pages together, while upstairs poor mother listens and waits, only daring to draw breath when she hears the sound of cheery voices below. Perhaps in their very sharpness and sureness these messages of death are merciful; but for the wounded and the missing there is the long, unending suspense of fear, and doubt, and pain.

And now it was the middle of March, Bobs had been wiping something off a slate with a vengeance; Majuba was avenged, and the note of relief sounded with the rescue of Kimberley had swelled to a roar with the news of the safety of those heroes of Ladysmith. That note was to swell into a wilder ecstasy later with the entry of our troops into Mafeking, when all England went mad in its boundless relief of pride and joy.

For our men had given literally a life for a life in going to release their starving brothers at Ladysmith; they had died, and been proud to die on the road; but to those who got there, which was the more moving sight, the gaunt, fever-stricken, besieged, or the twenty-two thousand Tommies—lance, foot, and gunners, irregular horse, Colonials, blue-jackets, and Indians—blistered and tanned, caked with mud and bloodstains, as ragged as sweeps, who passed for three full hours before

General White, cheering, laughing, shouting, and tossing their helmets?

"And who shall describe the poor rescued, or tell
With what feelings these greater than conquerors found them?"

"I hoped," said Sir George, "to uphold the shield long enough to enable the sleepy giant John Bull to wake up and have his own." Thus spoke the hero, and the thing that he willed to do, he and his starving garrison had done.

At home we had taken our gruel like men, and now the sun winked out delightfully, the air was brisk, Bond Street woke up, and preened itself, and every one seemed to be saying, "God bless my soul, what have I been having the hump so badly about? It's a gay world—a good world; and now I mean to enjoy myself, and hope for the best!"

That was how Cinders and Mrs. Beauclerk felt on this particular morning as they went humming down the street a little faster, perhaps, than the police would have approved of if they had not been infected by the prevailing lightheartedness, and carefully looked another way.

Both loved the *va-et-vient* of the thronged street; the electrical touch of the crowd gave meaning and value to the comradeship of these two congenial spirits; and Cinders looked, and was, radiantly happy. Most people in regretting the past, and fearing the future, miss the one golden hour that alone is theirs—the present.

"A little success is the finest cosmetic in the world," exclaimed Cinders. "Just look at the faces of all those hosts of men and women! It's all very well to sit tight, and draw your lips in when you're mortally hit, but how much pleasanter to let yourself go—and laugh."

"If you don't get a laugh out of life," said Lucilla, "life will get a laugh out of you; or you will be pitied, which is next door to being kicked. It's better far to be called heartless and extravagant, than dowdy and a worry, and to go a-moting instead of staying at home to weep."

Cinders nodded. Mrs. Beauclerk's defiant attitude towards the world had never seemed to her vulgar and contemptible, as to Celia. It was the wailing of some of the other women of her own set that had driven her fastidious self into the other extreme. Perhaps Cinders knew how the boy's voice (he was under twenty and had barely left Sandhurst) sounded always in her ears, "You'll keep it up, mother?"

"I have already counted three men of the right sort," said Cinders. "Alleluiah! At the present rate man will become a fancy animal, and be exhibited in a glass case at so much a head."

Mrs. Beauclerk laughed as she dexterously stole a march on a fast trotter, showed a clean pair of heels to a friend's high steppers, and turned corners with an exquisite precision that did not in the least interfere with her conversation.

"Men may be poor creatures, but we can't get on with-

out them," she said. "Woman is a kite; she can't fly, and fly handsomely, unless a man's hand holds the string. To be sure some men don't know how to hold it; they either let go too far, and the string breaks, and hey, presto, your bright skirts, sailing so securely and insolently in the wind, lie draggled in the gutter, or they don't let out enough, and you flop about like a swan trying to walk."

Here, as if to complete the illustration, a fat lady darted almost under the wheels of the motor, dancing heavily as she regained the pathway.

"Why are poor fat people so indecent?" said Lucilla protestingly; "when we see love being made to a fat woman on the stage we are angry and disgusted, but *nothing* shocks us in a thin woman. To the thin all things are possible. But to return to our bit of string; it is the first weapon a cynical male Providence puts into a male child's hand—he practises it on his mother! It's a humbling thought that a woman's failure or success, her happiness or misery, depend entirely on the relation in which she stands to some man. When you hear of a woman making a brilliant success of her life off her own hook, don't you believe it! It *looks* all right from outside; and one day she commits suicide, or does something absolutely mad, as outsiders think, but perfectly rational from *her* point of view—well—we mostly try to be happy because we *want* to be; we are good because we *must*."

"And it's such hard work," said Cinders, and sighed.

"Some don't try. There's Lexborough with Lady Alix." There was a note of surprise in Lucilla's voice

as they flashed past a young woman exquisitely dressed in black, who had a dark, foreign, and rather petulant face.

Cinders looked curiously at the slender figure, crisp and *soignée*, always striking its own definite note in a jarring world of colours and half-colours. It is nature alone who has learned the trick of mixing her pigments harmoniously.

"I never saw them together before," said Lucilla. "I don't admire her, but men like those eyes that look round the corner, and suggest an assignation! And I fancy she has kept more than one with Arundel. But whether Arundel likes it or not (for a moment her thoughts dwelt on Lexborough, but she dismissed the idea) she means to marry him."

"And will she?" said Cinders. What a wonderful world it was, when out in the dark on business, one was surrounded on all sides by persons invisibly playing their own game!

"Well," said Lucilla, "men do not take sufficiently into their calculations the chances of love as they take the chances of any serious undertaking, and yet in marriage, and affairs of the heart generally, it is usually the unexpected that happens, and many a man wakes up one morning to find on the pillow beside him the very last woman in the world he wanted for his wife, and wonders how the dickens she got there! And the average man likes a woman who doesn't mind being forgotten till he happens to want her again; but she must never for one instant forget *him*—that is the one deadly sin.

Most men haven't time to please a woman: they want one who pleases them, and to look sharp about it too!"

"Do you think any man is ever as good as he looks, or as bad as he seems?" said Cinders meditatively. "When I see bad people, I wonder what their bringing up was—what influences moulded them. Perhaps Sir George had a bad mother?"

"Yes, she is odious—odious; but mother or no mother" (Cinders shrank, and mentally put a good mark against Arundel's bad ones), "personally I prefer a fault at the top of the basket, and then to go on to the sound fruit below; but I'm afraid the basket—Arundel, I mean—is rotten right through. He isn't even 'a beast with gleams.' His motto is simple—never ask for what you want: *take it;* and it's always at the expense of our sex. It is the lover who takes no thought for what he loves, but who, in a direct, brutal manner 'goes for' a woman, who wins her. There is this difference between the Arundels and Andrews of this world, and it is *all* the difference. The one will look at you, and treat you as *a* woman, the other (if he loves you) as *the* woman."

Cinders turned her head away. It always made her angry to hear Lucilla falling into the common error, and praising Andrew for his relations towards women.

"Arundel," said Lucilla, "doesn't like a woman who wears all summer in her smile; he likes thunder and lightning. He always strikes me as what Byron was before his fine frenzy of character and lawlessness was

ruined by that meddling wife of his. Arundel is just Byron without the genius that excused everything. Meanwhile he averts the indigestion that an existence composed solely of women is bound to produce by steeplechasing, and in his heart prefers his horses!"

"I hope he won't make love to Celia," said Cinders uneasily.

"He has honestly tried—just to spite Mackenzie—but he *can't*. He hates a woman who is all sugar. Celia keeps her vinegar for women. That's her mistake. A dash of cayenne pepper—otherwise the devil—would make her irresistible."

"Did you ever notice" (she was off on one of her constant digressions) "the wary eye of the society woman in the street? Formerly when our class was unassailable—sure of itself—women did not look like that, afraid of having to recognise some bounder."

"Was—was Celia fond of her husband?" inquired Cinders.

"I never knew him. They were only married a year. He drank, and used to spend hours digging in the garden looking for bodies, while Celia would sit before her glass practising a face wash, or try its effect on men at some assembly. I mean to write an essay some day on 'The Dirtinesses of extremely Clean People'—it's dirty to insist so on being clean! But she was wise, and never took the world into her confidence. Explanations are 'odorous,' and people hate them. They'll forgive the flagitious person when they

meet him, because he has not bored them, and damn you, the injured one, because you *have!*"

With smooth swiftness she stopped at a particular shop in Regent Street, alighted, and disappeared.

"Cinders!"

And a magnificent young male animal leaped out of a passing hansom, rushed at, and seized her willing hand, while joy radiated from the pair of them as at an extremely pleasant sight.

"*Bobbie!* When did you come up? How refreshing to see a man!"

"And you always pitched into us so!"

"I did, but I didn't know. You are dear glorious creatures; this war has made even you bad ones good. Who was it said a little while ago that honour is as difficult as heroism in these decadent days? They're not decadent; and now you have the heroism, we women will try and find the honour; and if we will only behave, and let you alone, and not trip you up, and dog you about, why——"

"That's not much in your line," said Bobbie, whose height and breadth seemed to block out the whole street.

"Bobbie, we're just a seething, bubbling cauldron of womankind here in town, and it isn't healthy, and I've been quite longing for a rude, noisy, tiresome man smelling of tobacco!"

"It's about the first time you ever *did* long for one," said Bobbie significantly, who was genuinely angry with

her, but in his joy at unexpectedly seeing her, had quite forgotten it.

"It's your rarity," she said; "a case, you know, of—

'Where *man* as prospect pleases
And woman alone is vile!'"

"Well," and he scanned her closely in her workmanlike yet smart leather coat, "I thought you too good a sportsman for this sort of thing."

"It doesn't hiss and bubble," cried Cinders. "The motive power is petrol," she went on glibly. "Ignition is by electric spark and incandescent tubes. Either may be used separately or together as required. The tank holds six gallons of oil, sufficient for a journey of 125 miles——"

"And whoever the man is," he said, growing very red, "he has no right to leave you out here with this beastly crowd looking down your throat, and up into your brain."

"Vulgar wretches," said Cinders. "But we think far too much about onlookers; in a way we are more vulgar than they are. The Greeks *acted* their lives, and absolutely ignored the chorus, even conducted their love affairs with sublime indifference before it! *We* almost make the chorus the actors, in our consideration of it, or act half-heartedly, one eye on our part, the other on our ignorant critics. And it isn't a man, it's Lucilla Beauclerk."

"That pretty woman who puts her head on one side in such a silly-ass way?"

"She does it to deceive you, stupid; how could she be so popular with men if they suspected her of brains?"

"You're getting to talk like all these modern girls," he said resignedly. "I suppose it's because no man has ever taken the trouble to contradict them. Don't let *your* tongue get so sharp, it cuts a man's love like the sword of fate. That's one of the reasons fellows don't marry nowadays, the girls know too much."

"The men, you mean," said Cinders in an indignant whisper, even though she ignored the chorus that pressed around.

"What are you doing in town? You're not trying to get out to the front?" she added hastily.

"Of course I am," he said, "for all I'm worth; haven't those spiteful brutes at the War Office kept me out all this time?" And he groaned aloud. "I'm just off to badger them again; I'd like to string 'em all up in a row in Pall Mall."

"Not *all*," protested Cinders.

> "'There's no black flock, no matter how ye breed it,
> But *one* white sheep is there!'"

"Mrs. Beauclerk, this is Sir Robert Ingestre, my nearest neighbour in the country, you know, and an awfully good pal."

Bobbie took off his hat and Lucilla's head was quite straight as she looked at him, then she smiled.

"A good character from Cinders means a great deal,"

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and she gave him a warm hand-clasp. "She is dining with us to-night. Will you come?"

Bobbie hesitated. He was only too well used to Cinders' tender mercies, and found that peace of mind was only compassed by keeping out of their way.

"Yes, come," said Cinders; and as he was used to obey her, when he had written down the address and hour, he handed Lucilla in, and stood still to watch their swift and graceful progress towards the Park, followed by the admiring remark of a man in the crowd, "You go to heaven, ladies!"

"I never thought to be so glad to see a lumbering wretch of a man as I am to see Bobbie," said Cinders.

"And *I* never saw a finer specimen of a wretch than your Bobbie," said Lucilla. "And only a pal?" she added, raising her brows.

"Oh!" cried Cinders warmly, "when all the colour is gone out of my mouth, and my departed teeth have made my face fall in, and my head is like the bald places of Jerusalem, I wonder if men will let me be a *real* pal to them?"

"No, my dear," said Lucilla drily. "A woman can't be a satisfactory and delightful chum to a man till she is moderately old—till experience has put the right mixing into her brains and character; and then it's too late. He wants a young one, sound in wind and limb like himself."

"Why can't we all be just brothers and sisters?" cried Cinders impatiently; "help one another in time

of trouble, enjoy things together in happy times, and not be arbitrarily dubbed man and woman? Our attitude is regarded from one focus only; there's too much of the man and woman business, too little of human comradeship in the whole attitude. You might stand for hours watching a smart crowd, and not see one man and one woman speak to each other with the free and independent dignity of equals conscious of obligations to the world they live in. On the one side is the wish to attract, on the other the desire to be violently attracted."

Mrs. Beauclerk nodded.

"If we show any liking or suitability to each other," went on Cinders, "people say things, spiteful things, venomous things; a man must like you, or he doesn't like you in *that* way, but in no other way. Just as men are drawn together, so may men and women be drawn together for a thousand more durable things than a fleeting emotion. I should like to feel that a man could put his head on my shoulder, or I on his in time of trouble, and not to feel that it was a male or a female, but a human being, no less and no more."

"And I should say," remarked Lucilla, "that Sir Robert's shoulder would be very much at your service And, after all, my dear, to put love in a nutshell, you may call it affinity, love—anything you will—but a happy life-partnership simply means congenial company."

"That is what I want," cried Cinders eagerly; "that we should be real good pals and nothing else."

Lucilla sighed. Happiness had eluded her too surely for her not to snatch eagerly at its flying skirts for her friends.

"It's the bucolic lovers who drive you girls into the arms of clever men," she said. "That's the mistake of all women brought up in the country, that they want an intellectual man bred up in city wickedness! Ten to one if he's as clean as Nature! Not that I could ever see that the country was more moral than town. The only difference is, that there you know every detail of your neighbour's vices, in town they don't know yours."

"I'm so glad Celia is coming to-night," whispered Cinders as Lucilla set her down in Norfolk Street, "for she is sure to make love to Bobbie. Heaven send that he may return it!"

CHAPTER X

"He saw life like a beautiful light which shines only for an hour. And he saw all these men and himself pulling down black blinds, and making all things gloomy and horrible during that hour."

USUALLY it is the ticket of fancy value affixed to us by an ignorant stranger that doubles our value in the eyes of those who should know us best. It was this fact that made Celia look across Mrs. Beauclerk's dinner-table at Cinders with new found respect, for already the girl had made her mark in the country, if she had effaced herself in town. Robert Ingestre was quite good enough for any woman, and from a worldly point of view a much better match than Celia's own chosen lord, Andrew.

Bobbie, who sat next to Celia, thought her "ripping," and Cinders, aware that with a man's sure instinct for personal comfort, Bobbie had divined Celia to be a fool, wondered if, after all, Aspasia, Cleopatra, and Theodora would not have marshalled their lovers as a child does his regiment of tin soldiers, just as well without their brains as with them?

Mr. Beauclerk hated crowding, and had long ago introduced the custom of scarlet morocco elbow chairs at his table, so that there was a sense of space and

elegance delightful, as was all the rest of that perfect house, to Cinders, as she sat by her host's side, and glanced round at the small party of six assembled, then at himself.

He was one of those slight, spiritual-looking, elegant men, who, in a half light, might pass almost for an elusive, graceful ghost, and indeed it seemed his desire to slip out of all the more active and energetic rôles of life.

"At my age I like to be *quiet*," he said. He was twelve years older than Lucilla, and not yet fifty—in the very prime of life as a man's life should be—and like many another man whose (at one time)

> "Only books were women's looks,
> And folly all they taught him,"

at a later period of his life, Beauclerk had embraced the self-indulgent luxury of inordinate reading, since it called for no serious efforts, no expenditure of energy on his part; it was eminently respectable, it was agreeable, and by the name of "Study" is dignified what is perhaps the most brutally selfish (to those around him) of all the minor vices.

His manner had all the sweetness of a man so profoundly selfish that he did not even know it, and Cinders had long ago been reluctantly compelled to admit his ability and charm, but there was something bloodless about him, with no extravagance of hate any more than of love in him. His pursuits satisfied him

amply; his books gave him no trouble; insensibly he had reached the point when he regarded women as a nuisance, and he could be very kind and even attentive, but not be a lover any more; Lucilla would not expect it. Perhaps he knew that Cinders was watching him intently, as one may a fish in a glass bottle, not quite sure if its visible breathing is due to lungs only, or if there is also concealed somewhere a heart.

But, after all, thought Cinders, it is a person's manners, and little personal peculiarities, that estrange or attract you, not his passive vices or his virtues, for the one we actually see, the others we take on trust; and it is a lamentable fact that the visible dinginess of a man's nails and linen dye him so much deeper in our estimation than the very blackest of those sins that we don't behold! And Beau's manners were delightful.

And in this she was in touch with him, that she, too, loved solitariness, was not afraid to be face to face with her own soul. Perhaps he knew this, and—for she had been in and out of the house very often of late—Cinders interested him. He divided women into two classes, those who interested him, and those who did not. He liked to watch her eyebrows — long, slender, dark brown, so mobile that they ran up to her forehead and down over her eyes. But he thought her misnamed—something that suggested a live coal would suit her much better.

"Why did you select my wife's unfortunate family to be born into?" he said presently.

"Unfortunate? I think it's a beautiful family," said Cinders, glancing at the two other women present—and by accident all three were dressed in white, and two of them wore no jewels. "Besides, I wasn't."

He glanced at Bobbie, and said, "Then I congratulate the new family that will claim you as relative."

Cinders shook her head.

"Is it necessary to marry?" she said, almost as if she were Celia. "You read so much that you must know 'A wise man should avoid married life as if it were a burning pit of coals,' so says the Dhammika-Sutta."

He threw out his long slender hands.

"A man's usual reason for being fond of a woman is that every reason is against it—and the same applies to her. When inclination and the law march together, you get marriage. It is the springe in which we are all caught sooner or later—men and women alike. But I must plead an exquisite excuse," and he looked across at his wife, whom he genuinely admired for not belonging to that old order of women that makes a looking-glass of her husband only, and when *he* becomes opaque, dresses unbecomingly, and at hap-hazard in the dark. Yet she had never tilted her cap at any other man, which perhaps was the reason so many men had set theirs at her.

And if she had not Celia's radiant youth, neither had Celia the intangible perfume and charm of Lucilla's beauty, that showed to even more than usual advantage beside her cousin Lexborough, *l'ami de la maison*,

though her conversation decidedly did *not*, as with him she invariably behaved worse because he expected her to behave better.

He was a tall, dark, silent man, with a salient jaw, who talked little, but then very much to the point. He had one odd habit, that when Lucilla was speaking, even if not to him, Lexborough looked at, and heard no one else, so that the person addressing him had to wait till she had done.

"I have noticed," Lucilla was saying, in what Bobbie would describe as her silly-ass voice (and both her folly and her beauty were accentuated to-night), speaking of a mutual acquaintance, "that a high nose often goes with a high stomach; and we've no use for high noses and stomachs in these democratic days. It's a high purse people look at."

"But we don't, Mrs. Beauclerk," cried Robert Ingestre eagerly. "People call us a nation of shopkeepers; but there is not much of that element in the present war!"

"This struggle of ours has changed many an evil-doer into an upright man," exclaimed Cinders, always eager for her dear Tommies; "planted honour in a man where there was no honour before. Every big battle we have fought has done its work in this direction, and the reverses most of all; strangely enough, it is the black sheep, worse than the worst at home, that come back as good as the best when purged by war."

For the moment she had forgotten that it was an unwritten law in this house that at table the war should never be discussed, and now Beauclerk and Lexborough exchanged a swift glance; it was almost as if the two men were on guard, watching.

"Half the boys out there die of starvation," said Celia comfortably, as she helped herself from a dish handed to her, and little as the Beauclerks had eaten before, after that speech they ate nothing.

Cinders looking suddenly at Beauclerk, who had been watching his wife closely, saw him glance at the picture of a boy, gay and débonnair, that hung on the wall, and something in his eyes hurt her.

"It is a man's work," she said softly, "and he is doing it like a man."

"There is only one greater tragedy than having no children, and that is to have only one," he said in the same tone; "but if you *must* be a parent, take care that you are the mother. Archie's letters are addressed to both of us; but I read, and my wife keeps them. Women have that advantage over men at least; the fathers get left."

"Poor Morvina," said Celia; "have you heard? They call it an overdose of chloral," and Cinders saw Beauclerk's hands clench under the table.

For a moment there was dead silence, then—

"Death," said Lucilla, in an odd, high-pitched voice (as if she called it by a wrong name), "is an august occasion; we make ready against birth, why not against

death? Dying requires almost as many precautions as living—arranging for it, and so on. It is not a thing to decide in a hurry—it wants a lot of thinking out; not the how, but the when and the where! In whose house to take such a liberty; not even in one's own, if entailed!"

"I read lately," said Cinders, "of a woman who committed suicide because she had put clean clothes on. She could not pay her rent, and on her way to drown, met another woman, and told her so. The other woman went to borrow the money, but when she came back, the first had drowned herself—resolved that those clean clothes should not be in vain! And, after all, the dead have the best of it; we are all in such a hurry, but there is no hurry with *them*. While we are looking through our wardrobes for our second-best to give our poor worrying folk who have once been rich, lo! they put on immortality, and leave us gaping."

"And from her point of view, I think that woman was right," said Lucilla. "To rich and poor, life is complicated, death is not. Life is one long whimper after luxury; death is grandly contented with a sheet, and looks it. And when life becomes impossible," she added, in a lower tone, heard only by Lexborough, "*go*."

Lexborough's eyes flashed; he had got the clue—the one link in the chain that had baffled him during the last months.

"I did not know that Archie's mother was a coward," he said under his breath; but she heard and ignored him.

She was talking much more than she usually did at her own table, and this with her was a sure sign of excitement or suffering.

"Don't you think," she said, addressing Cinders, whose eyes always answered her—nothing provoked her more than that Beau let her run on, never attempted to argue with her—"that we talk a lot of nonsense about those poor dead (we call them poor because they can no longer interfere with us), waiting to be rejoined? Just take the other side. Imagine a masterful father or mother accustomed to keep order in the family, and think of his or her disgust when Tom, or Dicky, or Angela turn up, much the worse in looks and character since parted with here below! Can't you fancy the autocratic one saying, 'What have you done with your opportunities, sir, or madam, and my money? I'm not at all glad to see you; in fact, I'm right down ashamed of you!' And so on."

Cinders laughed out, but Bobbie frowned; it is so hard with some men to tell where humour in a woman ends, and license begins; and if this was a sample of dinner conversation in town, he preferred country stupidity.

Lexborough, in his somewhat harsh, deep voice, tried to give a new turn to the conversation.

"Our old friend, Dante," he said, "was a little before

his time in dressing the angel who guards the gates of purgatory in khâki. He says—

> 'Ashes or earth when excavated dry
> Would with his raiment in colour closely vie.'"

Bobbie sighed heavily.

"Purgatory," he said, "is for us poor devils who can't get out."

"And it's so *selfish* of you," cried Celia warmly. "Why, this war has simply changed the face of society; half the wives have deserted their best men to rush off to Africa to look after their husbands: everything is wiped out, forgiven and forgotten! How glad the women must be that they had their good time; how blamelessly they will wear their widows' weeds, and begin it all over again!"

Beauclerk glanced at her with genuine pity, for we English have neither the language nor the light touch of the French that enables them to play above difficult subjects without offence. We only manage to be indecent.

And Celia's tongue was rapidly undoing the effect of her beauty on Bobbie. He hated, as Cinders well knew, to hear women talk with what he called "a free wheel," and the quality of many a man may be judged

> "By the sharp pain, light pen and gossip tongue,
> Wrought in him, chafing the soft heart within."

To him there were only two sorts of scandal—the one that was true (therefore pitiful), the other that was a lie; and to rejoice over the one was a brutality, to utter the other a disgrace.

He thought of Zola, who, after being fêted and rushed about all over London, declared that the only thing out of the whirl that he took back to Paris was the tune, "And her golden hair was hanging down her back," and how the fact of a young girl's disgrace and ruin was made the subject of much light-hearted laughter and amusement.

He turned to Cinders, charging suddenly into her elusive, unsubstantial conversation with Beauclerk, and she turned to him eagerly, as to something warm and alive.

"You haven't inquired for Biffen," he said, "who is more beastly improving than ever." (Biffen was their Rector.)

"He isn't picturesque in imparting information," said Cinders; "that's the secret of getting people to listen to you—to be picturesque, and brief; a hundred ideas to one word, not a hundred words to one idea, as George Sand said. Mr. Biffen stokes it down your throat like a blue pill and a black draught—ugh! Mrs. Biffen pretends to believe what he tells her—that he is very clever. Isn't it funny that a man only believes his wife is smart because he sees another man is sure of it, while *she* takes her husband's unsupported word on trust?"

Bobbie did not reply, only his eyes said, "Now don't you try to be clever!" but Cinders airily disregarded him.

"If you walk a yard with him," she said, "he'll begin about what quarter the wind is in—north or south, or the rest of it. Now I know when it's in the north by feeling wretched; when in the east by my temper being

more than usually fearful; and it's in the west and south when I'm with people I love!"

"I'm afraid it isn't more than nor'-west to-night," whispered Bobbie.

"But indeed it is," she replied in the same tone. "With you and Mrs. Beauclerk both here, I'm as happy as a bird," and she looked it. "Don't you think life was meant to be on the quick return, small profit system; something turned over every waking moment of our short lives? This only really dawns on you when you are getting old; but as it is, I don't mean to waste any more time."

Bobbie nodded. He had found out that pleasant game long ago, and grown brown as a berry over it, and he exhaled the very atmosphere of clean, manly outdoor life in the somewhat over-rarefied air he just then breathed, and it greatly attracted Celia.

"The one thing women worship is brute force, there's so much more in brutal physical predominance than people think," thought Mr. Beauclerk, watching Celia's face curiously. He had never seen her look so well as beside Bobbie's stalwart brownness, and Cinders, who usually felt what other people were thinking, followed his glance, and decided that Andrew was decidedly not half so becoming.

Celia fell to talking to Bobbie about plays (not without intention), which drew from Mr. Beauclerk the cynical protest that whereas Sontag, the bewitching Swedish singer who in 1828 was introduced into London society

by the French Ambassador, *was spared the degradation of the silken cord* which at that time separated artistes from the general company in great houses.

"Nowadays, there is an invisible cord stretched to prevent society infringing on the sacred circle within which actors and actresses stand, and our knees grow rheumatic with much kneeling," he concluded.

"But the women dress so well!" pleaded Lucilla, who personally had bowed the knee to neither of the two great modern forces, wealth and the stage. "Where would our dressmakers be without plays? We send them to every new piece as a matter of course to get new wrinkles."

"Where did you pick up that *nice* little boy?" inquired Celia of Cinders in the drawing-room.

"Grew him myself—down away home. 'Back to the Land,' you know, if you want a *man*. Now don't you try to break his heart, for we bucolics still have hearts, or I'll tell Andrew."

"I like those sons of Anak," said Celia, "and he's so manly."

"Wait till you see my 'Girt Jan Ridd,'" exclaimed Lucilla rashly; "he would make two of Sir Robert." And then she blushed, and Celia looked at her closely.

"Do you keep him in that mysterious retreat of yours that no one can discover?" she said with some malice; "but, anyway, Cinders' lover is big enough for anything!"

"He is not my lover," said Cinders promptly. "I mean, I am not his."

"H'm. That reminds me," said Celia, "Fay's husband is dead. She only goes to matinées at present, and with one lover; soon it will be the evening—and two."

"Three would be safer," said Lucilla, angry at her slip, as Cinders went on one of these voyages of discovery through the beautiful rooms that always revealed some new treasure.

It is curious how a woman, nebulous in another person's house, and only remembered by us perhaps for something ridiculous in the shape of her nose, or her hat, or her husband, takes fast colours, and has a distinct identity of her own when you see her in her own home surrounded by the pots and pans, and companions of her own, or ancestors' sympathetic choosing; and Lucilla's home explained Lucilla.

"So you are going about a good deal with George Arundel," she said; "is it quite safe or fair to Andrew? It's just the element of danger in your intimacy with him that makes it fascinating."

"Oh! it's safe enough," said Celia carelessly. "If you don't want to meet a man on the sly, avoid country-houses and hotels as the plague, and never see him in your house without servants within call—then you're perfectly safe. Why, I don't even dine and do a play with him alone!"

It had not yet dawned on her that he endured her company that he might enjoy Cinders'.

"Women are so illogical," said Lucilla; "they want

to do all the things that the 'other women do,' but shrink from the payment. But it wouldn't be amusing if it weren't wrong! You seem to have dropped Alix lately."

"She is in love with George Arundel, and bores me. Now Cinders does not. She is explosive, certainly——"

"I shouldn't call her explosive," said Lucilla, "I should call her *alive*. But there's so much in the point of view from which you look at things. For instance, 'voluble' and 'eloquent'—some people call it one thing, some another! And if you mean that Cinders is not low-voiced, conventional, moving through life on rubber-tyres, please remember that we well-bred people in minding our manners seldom do anything else! We have no heat, no vigour, no originality."

"She is my talking-machine," said Celia coolly. "Do you read Wells? He says that in the near future there will be no newspapers, but all the news of the world will be *talked* into our ears as we eat our breakfast! Now Cinders does that for me. I never need to read, seldom to think; I just listen to her, and my mind is stored. Nothing escapes her; she seizes a leading incident, an absurd situation, skips the twaddle and *pot-au-feu* literalness of some women's conversation and——"

"Then you go out to dinner and say all *her* good things as your own! Well, she is really partridge to your bread sauce, and spring onion to your bread and cheese. You show each other up wonderfully! But you won't *always* have her with you, I suppose."

"No," said Celia, and sighed. "Did she ever tell you that she is very wealthy?"

"Which means," said Lucilla to herself, "that she pays your milliner's bills, and runs three-quarters of your establishment." (Aloud.) "No, my dear, I didn't know. I have never heard Cinders even breathe the odious name of money."

"Perhaps," said Celia, glancing enviously around, for here were taste and culture, and a thousand signs of boundless riches, "but that is because you need never even think of it!"

"No, thank God! It is not one's own wants, but other folks', which they keep insisting on, that one finds insupportable. Money won't buy you one single thing worth having; it won't always keep off disagreeable ones! Will money buy health, or domestic affection, or congenial company, or enable you to do the one thing you want to do well? Will it give you Nature, or the love of it, or immune you from dishonour, disease, treachery, death? It's a fine lubricator, and it enables you to help others, but in the list of things I value most, I place it last."

"It is so simple to walk in an easy shoe," said Celia, at once extravagant and avaricious, "as I tell Cinders when she preaches the gospel of unselfishness!"

"She never preaches, only tries in a small way to act it. Why not make an effort that way yourself? But when you have no children—only cats—you're apt to grow scratchy!"

CHAPTER XI

"To be merry best becomes you ; for out of question you were born in a merry year."

BOBBIE knew Cinders' little ways—how she got up, as Celia expressed it, in the middle of the night for her morning ride, and he caught her as she turned into the Row, followed by her groom, the day after the Beauclerks' dinner.

Bobbie was never so much at home as in the saddle, and Cinders rode with a verve and dash that made her notable in the field, and both looked young, and fresh, and gay as the morning as they saluted with joy, and rode off together.

"I see that town has not quite spoilt your early hours," said Bobbie, looking with delight at her slim lines, and severely plain get-up, "and that habit's ripping—much too good for this beastly little village."

"What is one to do?" cried Cinders. "Not long ago I had become *dévergondé* to a degree; but clothes are like men—once you *do* get your eye into them, you can't stop."

"I *hate* upholstered women," said Bobbie, "and I don't like a girl to be always thinking of how she looks, but of son thing kind she's going to do—how to help

some poor devil over a bad hour, whether it's man, or whether it's woman. I suppose you would call it being unselfish. But that's the sort of thing one likes and wants in a wife."

"Bobbie," she said, "if it were not for Andrew Mackenzie, and you could put up with the little bit of her life left over from duties of the toilette, Celia would suit you down to the ground! I can honestly recommend Celia. I don't know anything more really and truly refreshing than the company of a first-class fool! I have always a feeling of rest and recreation when I am with Celia, and I don't wonder in the least that all you men *love* her!"

"I think Mrs. Schilizzi is an awfully good sort," said Bobbie, in the "no-scandal-talked-here-if-you-please" tone she so well knew. "She has plenty of small talk;" and Cinders smiled. "A man likes something silly and kind and comforting!"

"Now, was I *ever* silly?" cried Cinders wrathfully.

"Often. Your dear little head is full of crotchets and whims; coming to town, and slumming, is one of them. Why not be kind to *me*—and your own old people in the country? Charity begins at home."

"That's *Dinah*," said Cinders wrathfully. "Was I ever *kind?*"

"Sometimes."

"Or comforting? Never. It sounds like a copper warming-pan!"

"And who is Andrew?" inquired Bobbie.

"He's a dear. The only man—" she stopped abruptly. "But don't alarm yourself; he is engaged to Celia. Up to now, not a soul has even admired me. I'm deeply grateful to you, Bobbie; it's only in the country that any one wants to marry me. *Here* a man looks all round a girl, tots her up—so much beauty, so much influence, so much money, and good temper, and good looks—says 'not my style,' and walks off in the opposite direction."

"*I* didn't," said Bobbie bluntly. "And you had plenty of chances besides."

"Yes; but in Norfolk Street I have always deliberately smudged myself out — wore my darkest frocks (you know I look *hideous* in dark clothes), and manage generally to look the dowdy housewife that at heart I really am! One doesn't earn a name like mine for nothing."

Bobbie shook his head, and Cinders perversely misunderstood him.

"Oh, I know what you are thinking—that you don't know a more detestable type than to be a sloven at one minute, and *à quatre épingles* the next; but don't you think it's a sort of despairing energy? I mean, the excessive smartness that only the born untidy person ever arrives at?"

"I never saw you slovenly," he said, "nor yet fine."

"But I am both. There *was* a time when I danced about in tight boots that gave pleasure to all beholders. Latterly it has been, give me a comfortable boot that means pain for the person who sees it, but pleasure for

me. It's like those disinterested misers who starve and pinch themselves, that spendthrifts and rascals may squander their money, and insult their memories; it is magnificent, but it is altogether beyond me, and life's too short to live to please other people."

"And yet you are going to try," said Bobbie drily.

"Yes; but not in tight boots. It's rather cheap, and certainly it's possible to carry the cult of clothes too far," said Cinders; "one may be so *soignèe* as to be vulgar over it, though doesn't Goldsmith say that dress produces a kind of mechanical influence on the mind?

'He who would in business rise
Must either bust or advertise.'

Well, I'm going to advertise. I have been—a-hem—hiding my light under a bushel for a considerable time, and once in a way it's desirable to catalogue one's looks, find out where you stand, and make *other people* see it too. And fine feathers make fine birds; you should always look your very best for the people you despise most, on the principle that one is always beautiful to one's friends."

"And pray for whom do you wish to make yourself beautiful?" said Bobbie stiffly. "I suppose you don't put on your eyes, and mouth, and shoulders with your frocks, do you?"

"Manner maketh man, and clothes make woman," she began, then stopped at sight of the famous race-horse, "Son of the Morning," tearing up the Row with George Arundel on his back.

Bobbie scowled; if this was not an arranged thing, then what was it? He knew Arundel well by sight and reputation, and if he did not feel that revulsion against him which Cinders had once experienced, it was because a man seldom acts on any such impression, save when moved by personal reasons. That is perhaps why the way of males is the way of peace, so much more than is the way of impulsive woman. But experience had taught him that the skilful, coaxing management of horses and women is very much the same thing in the hands of certain men.

"Sir George Arundel," said Bobbie drily; "and I thought you hated that type of man!"

"But he can ride!"

A true woman always does a sum in subtraction from a man's vices; for his virtues she has her own multiplication table.

"Yes," said Bobbie, "he can ride." And added to himself, "He waits on the humours of a horse, as of a woman, for his own ends."

The "Son" was thundering past them, Arundel raising his hat, when Cinders made a slight gesture of invitation with her whip, and he turned as soon as the rush of the half-mad animal would allow him, but not before Bobbie had said in a disgusted tone—

"I thought *no* one admired you?"

Arundel had stared at Sir Robert as he went by in surprised recognition of an unexpected lover, for this was Cinders' lover of course; no man ever makes

a mistake in these matters with one of his own sex. He had always suspected that some man in the background had licked the little devil's mind and heart into its present fascinating shape; but within a very few seconds of introduction was quite certain it was not this one: Cinders would mould *him*.

"After all this is better than Mrs. Beauclerk's teuf-teuf," exclaimed Cinders, as the tan flew behind their horses' hoofs; and really she was taking it very coolly, Bobbie thought, caught out in an assignation with the fastest man in town, even though she had a groom behind her.

"I believe she could ride the 'Son' himself if she liked," Arundel was thinking, for her hands were as fine as his own, and the chestnut blood-mare she rode, like most of her colour, required dexterous management. And he shrewdly expected from her marvellous seat that she could ride as straight across country as himself, while on her side she noted the curious harmony of pride between himself and the brute he rode.

"A capital hunting morning," she said, and sniffed up the air with delight.

"Sir Robert," she said to Arundel, "is clamouring to get out to the front, and if I were a man I would try too. When I see fresh-faced little boys plunging straight into reckless, ardent life out yonder, I feel that all we say and do over here is just a repetition of words, words, *words!*"

"How you have managed to stick in this beastly

town as long as you have done," said Bobbie, ignoring Arundel, "beats me."

"I like to be here in winter," said Cinders, "but from the first of April to the first of October I loathe it. Yet, perhaps, it is a city of horrible contrasts most in the winter. But how could one live just now away from the evening papers?"

"You would sleep and live much better without them," grumbled Bobbie. "It's minding everybody's business, instead of consuming strictly one's own sorrows on the premises, that makes men and women the nervous, overstrained creatures they are to-day. The happiest houses are those into which the newspaper never goes! Do your work by all means, but don't be always watching to see how your neighbour does it!"

"And I'll promise you, Bobbie," cried Cinders in a warm whisper, "that if you *do* get out to the front, and are killed there, that I won't turn a hair!"

"I hate sentimental rot," said Bobbie. "Those chaps at the front are only doing their duty, and would hate to be praised for it.

> 'Ease after toyle, port after stormy seas,
> Peace after war, death after life,
> Doth greatly please.'

And after all, it's only *one* life — one death-pang — nothing to make such a fuss about! But by reading these confounded newspapers you assist at thousands of

deaths, when all you've got to do is to go through with your own!"

They were going at a walk, breathing their horses, and Arundel said:

"Do you mind telling me where you picked up that mare, Miss Devon?" and they plunged into pedigrees.

A very faint colour had come into the warm white of Cinders' skin; she was enjoying herself thoroughly, and had the sense to know it, and there is not the least question that two men who both admire you, while you do not love either, are much more satisfactory and exhilarating than the one whom *you* love, and hop from twig to twig after, like a limed bird.

She was beginning to get her eye in to that most fascinating of all pursuits, making a notoriously inconstant man really in love with her. It's the most entrancing, the most dangerous game out, for you have to take care that you don't put your foot out too far to draw it back, while encouraging the man to make no such mean reservations about *his* shoe leather! Moreover, when you know that the more you hurt him, the better it will be for his soul's good, you throw yourself into the game with much more zest! We don't weep for the fox who loses his tail and his life, probably he has chased and gobbled up scores of harmless bodies; on the contrary, we enjoy the sport, and cherish his brush as a memento.

"Sir Robert admires Mrs. Schilizzi very much," she said presently, not without malicious intention.

Bobbie jumped. Often she would be twice round the world and back again, before he had been able to take in the gist of her last remark.

"Mrs. Schilizzi is awfully fetching, and wonderfully like her aunt," said Bobby. "What lovely women they both are. But isn't Beauclerk rather lady-like?"

Arundel smiled. He had more than once in the past found that lady-like person a singularly successful rival, for spiritual-looking persons will often glide in at a keyhole, where visible fleshly wickedness is barred the door. But Beauclerk had always been discreet, and never even looked the way of a reputation such as George Arundel's.

"He doesn't smoke," said Bobbie, "and that's bad. A man is at a loose end who doesn't; says 'I'm dull, let's go and do something;' and it's usually mischief. Another man lights his pipe or cigar, and is happy."

"Mrs. Beauclerk never discusses her husband," said Cinders hotly, "and if you please, neither will we."

"But she always calls him by his surname," said Arundel meditatively; and then they talked of things, not people.

CHAPTER XII

"Every heart when sifted well
Is a clot of warmer dust,
Mixed with cunning sparks of hell."

LUCILLA was absent on one of those brief disappearances about which her friends had ceased to be curious, for, as she once pathetically remarked, once you have a character for virtue, it is impossible to lose it, and your own husband will order supper for two, give you the latchkey, and go to bed and snore! And though she never took her maid, and furnished no address, Beauclerk did not even ask her destination.

Bobbie had quite forgiven Lucilla that silly habit of putting her head on one side, when one day—and it was a great proof of her liking for him—she had shyly asked him if he *did* go, and should meet Archie, would he give him her love, and tell him she was very, *very* happy? "And if that is how a mother's eyes look when she is glad," thought Bobbie remorsefully, "how do they look when they weep?" But no one ever saw Lucilla weep, either then or after. Nor did any one ever hear her say, "When Archie comes back." It was always "If."

But with regard to Mrs. Beauclerk's absence, Celia got in her little scratch.

"There's a perfect understanding between her and Lexborough," she said one day to Cinders. "No harm, I *think*, but there's that 'she can't do wrong' in his eyes as he looks at her, which so completely gives a man away. And though she pretends that she adores Andrew, she is really, for all her airs, of the good old spaniel-woman sort, and cares only for Beauclerk. Still, half a loaf is better than no bread, and if a woman has no taste for fancy stuffs, and ornamental twists, what is the poor thing to do?"

"Then if Lucilla is of the spaniel sort," cried Cinders warmly, "I wish there were more like her in the world. And I think that you people who sit in your easy chairs, and criticise your fellow-humans, sympathising with none of their failings and sorrows, a law unto yourselves, represent the most godless, unchristian type that ever breathed!"

But Celia was thinking about a new gown, and did not trouble to answer. She was amusing herself extremely well just then; for, whether Bobbie took the initiative, or Celia did, the fact remained that these two paired naturally off, thus inevitably throwing Cinders and Arundel together at the little dinners, plays, and suppers to which, in its rebound from a frightful strain, the world rushed. Town was full, the air brisk, the news from the front improved each day; spring was in the air, and in the hour when the white flag went up over Cronje's laager, the British army passed, if not to victory, at least from the twilight of exasperating defeat.

But though Bobbie made a nuisance of himself at the War Office, closely following the tactics of that widow in the Bible who did more good than she ever knew of by her tenacious example, unlike her, he did not get what he wanted, though it was proved abundantly in the campaign that the best sportsmen furnished some of the very finest fighting and staying material the country had sent out.

Meanwhile (for he had his pride, and no intention whatever of breaking in on the two years of perfect freedom which Cinders had demanded before giving him a final answer), naturally he turned to Celia, and did not find her exasperating as Cinders did—quite the contrary. Celia had uncommonly pretty, helpless little ways of her own with men, especially with men of his type, and she found him a delightful companion, and in that atmosphere of sunny youth, Andrew's stern strength of character (to which she had to crane up, crick-necked) sometimes recurred disagreeably to her mind. She would shiver a little at the impending ordeal of his return, and depend more and more on Bobbie (who was a much better match), and wish that she had met him sooner.

She had from the first keenly resented Andrew's leaving her when he could just as easily have stayed, and had she not explicitly warned him that if he persisted in going, she was bound to flirt with somebody else? Bobbie had most opportunely dropped from heaven; and as to his love for Cinders, one woman

can always knock out another (if the latter do not love the man, *bien entendu*), and most men hate energising, and are only too apt, when half-way up the tree, to think the fruit not worth climbing for, and just slide comfortably back to mother earth.

Meanwhile she tore down from her worldly perch with such indecent rapidity that it was a wonder she did not break her neck before she got to the bottom (Cinders thought), and scandal now never passed her lips. Soon she would begin with Falstaff to babble of green fields (said Arundel), but Bobbie being a man, rejoiced at the improvement in her, and held her up as a pattern to Cinders, who had thrown her cap over the mill, and in a mood of miserable unrest—(there are at times such long, long hours in a woman's life if she does not shorten them by getting into mischief)—had thrown overboard her old true instincts about Arundel, and almost made a friend of him.

But it is ever the way—that a man looks for a spark of the devil in a woman, and by his very want creates it, and a woman looks for a seed of good in a man, and oftener finds it not, but goes on seeking all the same.

It was part of Arundel's creed to make women believe that he had been in wrong hands all his life, and Cinders thought that there was a little grain of good in every heart to be found if one searched for it—as also is the grain of evil.

"If there were more women in the world like you it would be a better world," he said to her one day.

Thus does the devil offer comfits to souls he woos down the incline; and yet, at odd moments, a feeling that with his growing love for the girl his skill was deserting him, swept uncomfortably over Arundel, for he knew that he made no real way with her, and this power of holding herself in reserve was the surest possible proof that she did not love him. Yet there was affinity of sorts between them, and Lucilla's comparison of him to Byron often recurred to her (in his splendour of life and capacity for enjoyment), and there was at times an originality and freshness about him that appealed strongly to her unconventional nature.

And she admired his cool mastery of life. All that the man did seemed perfectly unconscious, as unconscious as the wind; he made her careless too, and with him she might have said—

"We have pitched our tents, we feast and we play on the shifting sands of life;
We are drunk all day with the things of this world, with laughter and love and strife."

But still there were moments when Cinders felt that she hated him, realised vividly that he was another order of man to Bobbie and Andrew.

"Did you ever see a real moss-cup?" he said suddenly one night at the theatre; "well, your mouth is exactly the colour of one. And some day—" he paused, and she laid the back of her gloved hand against it, and as she often did, hated it for the colour that served her so much better with men than her mind.

"Il ne faut jamais dire à la fontaine, je ne boirai pas de ton eau," he said quietly.

But Cinders, as often, did not choose to hear.

"Do you think Sir Robert will get out?" she said.

"If he does, it won't trouble you much. I wonder if the doings of any man ever did?"

"Or will. I wonder."

"I mean to make you trouble about mine. But we are both too much alive; it would be a fight between us which should enjoy himself most."

But one day it dawned upon him that he had fallen in love with Cinders' mind. A mind is illusive, therefore worth pursuing. One does not tire so easily of a mind as of a body; it is something like the difference between a bicycle and a tricycle in turning corners; the bike doubles swiftly back on itself, the tricycle requires elbow-room, or it goes over; and besides her sense of humour, which was delightful, he found in her a quality that only bad women pretended to, and most good women looked askance at as sinful.

It was all very quiet and very subtle, and the most brilliant passages of the battle were conducted unseen and unsuspected in the very presence of the other two. But Lady Alix, looking on, pallid from afar, saw more than any one else saw, and her heart failed, for she knew that it is the unsuspected, out-of-sight woman that upsets all our calculations about a man; and at the Carlton one night, the light on Arundel's face when

he looked at Cinders, the way he turned to her when she spoke, were not to be mistaken.

Towards the end of the month Cinders went to see him ride at Sandown, and another subtle link was forged between them. Cinders loved horses but one degree less than dogs, and in the country the man who rode straight to hounds had her respect. Yet Arundel was no sportsman; sport was clean, and with rules that he had deliberately traversed all his life in his dealings with women.

It was a sparse meeting, the morning clear and fresh, with a lash of spring in it, and the two women who had come to see him ride sat in almost solitary state in the grand stand, and watched half-a-dozen horses cotillion up and down the course in a preliminary canter.

Arundel looked about as handsome and as wicked as a man can look, and his horse was wicked without being handsome, well known by reputation as a clever, bad-tempered brute, who "savaged" every soul who went near him save his master.

He tossed his head viciously from side to side at the start, throwing flecks of foam over his coal-black satiny skin, and the scarlet silk of his rider.

"They are well matched," said Celia, looking with keen interest at the pair through her race glasses, and the few present settled down to enjoy the race, which from start to finish was an exciting one.

The brute galloped stubbornly, sticking his toes hard

into the earth as if he wanted to buck Arundel out of the saddle with his vicious short jumps, and kept to that style all round the back of the course, while the favourite, moving like an exquisite bit of mechanism, was well up with the leaders, waiting for a rush to the front when the proper time should arrive.

And still Arundel made no effort, though he was last, and a good four lengths of daylight shone between him and the nearest horse. Less than half a mile from home he was still last, but sat quietly, nursing the iron mouth of the sullen brute with a gentle bit, and Cinders' heart beat fast, for this grim power of patience of waiting in the man whom she instinctively knew would win, sent a thrill of something not unlike personal pride through her veins.

But presently, three furlongs from the finish, something happened. His master had let him think that he was doing exactly what pleased him best, but now the brute seemed to decide to do something that was not expected of him, and setting the bit hard against his bridle, and straightening his neck till it was stiff as an iron bar, he galloped as if ten thousand whips were stinging his hind quarters.

Arundel crouched low over the animal's working withers, and carried him wide on the outside at the corner, and as he tore round the turn, and into the straight, three dropped behind in a bunch, looking as if they were standing perfectly still, though ahead of him were still the favourite and the others; then suddenly

a shout went up as, with a thunder of pounding hoofs, Arundel's horse swept past the favourite on the outside, and won.

Cinders longed to shout; never before had she seen such a race, such a horse and rider; and the blaze in her eyes was glorious, for Arundel had made her proud of him.

"I never admired him so much," cried Celia, her hands trembling as she lowered her race glasses; "and Lucilla Beauclerk practically accused him the other day of cowardice!" And it was she who enthused, Cinders who was cool and quiet, when Arundel presently joined them.

Bobbie carried a very sore heart, if a gay countenance, in those days: but he had seen Cinders flirt before, and, knowing her temper, now did not attempt to stop her, and he thought that her keen sense of humour must always protect her. You can't really hurt or *get at* a person who has real humour; tragedy won't touch it, or pity (it has no bowels of compassion); it sits high and dry, cracking its jokes, and looking down with a grin on broken heart, despairing soul, and fainting human flesh. Sometimes Cinders herself doubted the wisdom of that grim gift of the gods that may make you *bon camarade* to yourself, but seldom suffers you to be yoked in peace with another, because nothing and nobody can possibly be as ridiculous and interesting to you as you are to yourself. It is like a pier-glass tipped forward at an unbecoming angle, into which, whenever you look, you'll

find material for laughter, but when some one else looks over your shoulder, it ceases to be diverting.

Nevertheless Celia felt it her duty to give Cinders a friendly lead, not that she herself had ever required any. Huge personal conceit is one of the finest of all conservatives of virtue; moreover, Celia loved clothes, and knew that chiffons last, while man comes and goes —he is usually going.

"Arundel will never marry," she said one day, "and a girl's reputation is more delicate than a married woman's: perhaps because it is so much more precious," she added with some acidity. She was not blind to the fact that men undoubtedly prefer the wooing of girls to what has been the property of other men. Even if some of a woman's faults have been amended by matrimony, a real man likes to teach or correct all his wife's little tricks himself.

Cinders laughed. Possibly she resented Bobbie's preoccupation with Celia as much as that lady did Arundel's devotion to Cinders, but both being well amused, they put by their wrath for a more convenient season.

CHAPTER XIII

"Be it who it may be, he that flies shall follow;
He who withholds gifts, he shall bring thee many;
He that hates now shall love thee madly, wildly;
Aye, though thou wouldst not!"

ROBERT INGESTRE was a simple-minded person, and, like Chaucer, was not overburdened with a deep sense of the mystery of life, but, on the contrary, found it a glorious thing—

"Rich in man and maid,
With fair horizons bound,
The whole brave world of light and shade
Stood out a perfect round."

Where was the mystery? The problems were in men's minds, not in Nature, for mystery she had none. Life was there, and so was death, the last no bogie to frighten him. He was in love with the green earth, and his outlook was almost as simple as Dinah's; each asked only to be in Nature's lap, and enjoy her fruits, and the day's work, and the night's rest, while perhaps heaven to both of them, was but a very little beyond the red clouds of sunset. To these two, who believed with a perfection and intensity of belief rare in the modern mind—

"Le bon Dieu, gravely interfering
In all humanity's affairs,
Bending His kind grey head and hearing
The orphan's cry, the widow's prayers,"

was very real, and their simple faith showed to Cinders as beautiful.

How without it can we understand the buoyancy and *naïveté* of mediæval times, or penetrate to the inmost spirit of it? In those spacious days, through all troubles, and there were many, not a word of complaint was ever heard about the wretchedness of the world; men loved life, but also

"Neither feared, nor wished to die."

Bobbie never preached, yet as he sat silent while those around talked, his expression would seem to ask why they were all so busy about things that were of no real importance—why they were all ashamed to be for one single moment in earnest about anything?

It was just a pose, to talk flippantly, act worse; it was not natural, it was not becoming, it was not true; they were all just pretending, and no one was taken in, or believed it for a single moment. They went far to prove their monkey ancestry every day by their imitativeness, their fear of being different to other people; they treated life as a comedy, and tried to turn it into a farce, but later they would look back, and see themselves as hard-hearted buffoons, laughing where they should have wept.

Indeed there was a healthy tone, quite of the Middle

Ages, about Robert Ingestre, and in his bringing-up and life, as in Cinders', artificial wants, false laws of society, false rules of conduct, and a false condonation of the breaking of them, did not obtain. Man was a creature to breathe and enjoy, to be noble if he had an obstinate predilection thereto, but first to be happy, so long as he did not interfere with the happiness of others. And now, by way of a cleansing bath for his mind, he would often escape to Dinah Buckle (grossly neglected of late by Cinders), and take her out for a long walk, or on occasion to the play and supper, she in her best cap and white shawl, and he completely indifferent as to whether he was supposed to be taking his old mother about, or not.

And all his talk was of Cinders, so it was well for Celia's hopes that she could not hear him.

And so time passed, during that strange, unfamiliar season, in which Death, throwing his long shadow from South Africa, touched the half-gay, half-weeping crowd in town, and darkened it. For though the tide of battle seemed to have turned, the gigantic loss of life went remorselessly on; and some called it starvation, and some enteric, and many were bagged like partridges instead of in fair fight, but the sons of the noblest houses, and the poorest, all fared alike, and even Celia felt some discomfort at Andrew's silence, knowing that he was in the thick of the fighting, and no letter had reached her from him for weeks. And Cinders scanned the papers more eagerly than ever, and started

at every sound, growing more restless, more bitter-tongued, with every hour.

Bobbie was not blind to her nervous state, though for this he mainly blamed Lucilla, whom he did not consider a good companion for Cinders; the understanding between them was too complete for it to be beneficial to the girl, what one thought, the other said. If ever Cinders were badly disappointed, would she become like Lucilla?

Sitting at tea with her one late afternoon in March, he said—

"Beauclerk isn't such a bad sort, you know, after all. He only wants to be *quiet*."

"All you men side with one another," cried Cinders warmly. "To be *quiet!* Some day he'll sleep a little longer and later than usual, and be astonished to find that he is dead; but *I* shan't, for he is three-parts dead already! One of the old sages says, 'Be not a neuter in anything.' Well, he is just a neuter, which, strictly speaking, means a vegetable. And yet, like many another dry-as-dust man, only the flower that had perfume and colour attracted him! Can't a man be a glutton in reading as in any other thing that he likes? *You* are a glutton in sport. Beau browses on all these products of other minds as a well-fed beast does on a rich pasture——"

"I am all with you *there*," cried Bobbie, but Cinders waved him aside.

"John Morley says that everybody endowed with

energetic intelligence has a measure of the spirit of search poured out upon him," said Cinders. "All such persons act on the Socratic maxim that the life without inquiry is a life to be lived by no man. Now don't you think that there should come *first*, inquiry into the tastes, mind, and heart of the one person who has chosen you out of the whole world to constitute her lifelong happiness or misery? And does Beau study Lucilla? Does he ever go halves in a pleasure with her? A man has no business to create and enjoy private and solitary tastes, if he is married. It's the little walk, the little talk, the little treat (all to their two selves), any one of the things that money won't buy, yet that the two poorest lovers alive can command at will, that make women happy! You men may keep all the big things, if you'll give us the small change that makes the blessedness of women's lives. Even a millionaire wants petty cash to get on with, and if you give *us* a little something to go on with—to feel our pockets (otherwise our heart) are not *quite* empty—we chirrup like birds!"

"Poor chap!" cried Bobbie indignantly; "for my part I am awfully sorry for him. How can you expect a clever man like that to dance attendance on a female Rochefoucauld dressed like a fashion plate? And I do think it most awfully unfair. Just because a man doesn't smoke or ride, and is a bit of a stick, *does* it excuse a woman's going off at a tangent, and did you ever hear a tongue with such a tang to it as

Mrs. Beauclerk's? It's battle, murder, and sudden death to love to hear her!"

"She is very fond of him," said Cinders, touched on the raw, for she had herself picked it up so glibly —and thought it so clever—not cheap, common sort of talk.

"Then why can't she be sincere, and not ashamed to show that she likes him?" cried Bobbie. "A man isn't all a brute, and knows how to appreciate real devotion and constancy."

"Oh!" said Cinders enigmatically, "it is only age that really tames a man, but he frequently mistakes it for virtue!"

"There you go again," cried Bobbie wrathfully. "But if they can't hit it——"

"Beau doesn't think there is another woman in the world like her," struck in Cinders hotly.

"Then she would do better to go and live her own life on natural lines—pretending is *no* good. I sometimes think that Arundel is the most honest of us all, inasmuch as he does not pretend, and those whom we stone for wickedness (otherwise being truthful) should stone *us* if the natural course of things were obeyed. And it may be," he paused, and coloured, "that the woman who follows natural laws, with Nature's indifference to consequences, is nearer to a perfect woman as God meant her, than she who fights and blunts Nature at all points, forcibly diverting into other channels the instincts that should have made

her, as glorious mate and glorious mother, attain to the highest development of herself as human being."

"Were you thinking of *Celia?*" inquired Cinders, opening wide eyes whose derisiveness lashed Bobbie into a rage. "What book did you get that out of?"

"Like your *âme damnée,*" he cried, "you won't stick to the text. But if she likes *him,* and Beauclerk doesn't think there's another woman in the world like her—" he shook his head hopelessly, for this new morality that made a man admire his wife above all living women, then spend all his time away from her, while the men who *didn't* admire their wives, or even seem to know what they were like, were yet always with, and true to them, was beyond poor Bobbie's comprehension.

"Perhaps if she had been christened plain Jane she would have been a rattling good woman, without bunkum of any sort; but she felt bound to live up to 'Lucilla.' If only folks would realise that the world's eye is *not* upon us, and does not care a twopenny damn what we do, perhaps they would be natural. And she does you no good. A year ago you wouldn't even have *thought* of flirting with a man like Arundel; you admit you hated him at first; yet this vitiated atmosphere of morals made you deny your instincts, and play the fool like the rest of them!"

"Thank you," said Cinders with spirit, all the more angry because what he said was perfectly true.

Waking in the dead of night, it would flash on her that

she had more reason to be ashamed of her conduct with Arundel than all the rest of her life put together. But Bobbie's next words extinguished that shame in anger.

"At first I thought the change in you was poor Celia's fault, but it was only surface harm on her part, that has quite disappeared now," said Bobbie, with all a man's dunderheaded complacency in his own work. "Why don't you take a leaf out of *her* book, instead of going one better than Mrs. Beauclerk?"

Cinders choked.

"How *dare* you compare them?" she cried in a fury, then gave him the curving lip and shrug with which one dismisses the perfect fool.

"It all comes out in the wash, wash,
It all comes out in the wash,"

she said. "Your density, Celia's powder, Arundel's wickedness, Andrew's grit; only grit *won't* wash out!"

"Anyway," said Bobbie, "this wonderful Andrew of yours thinks sufficiently well of Celia to want to marry her!"

"Yes, she is very restful," said Cinders, with a smile so glad that it was curious how it irritated Bobbie. It was her lot with him always to appear spiteful towards Celia, and this was something new to Bobbie, and inevitably lowered her in his estimation.

"Oh!" he said hotly, "if you mean that she isn't always *reading*, I admire her for it. It's a conceited man who thinks he can read and know everything. By the time he has got to know his own little corner of the

dust-bin, and swept up its dust, he has got *to go*. Fiction makes us the scapegoat of every tragedy since the world began; we have to bear them all, and we reel under the combined weight. It's like unsatisfactory families: if each stood alone he could win; but he is handicapped by pity and love for the others, so drowns with the rest."

"And of course, you never showed any to anybody," said Cinders; but her eyes were kind.

"There's nothing new between covers," went on Bobbie; "*do* things, and *feel* 'em—that's always new. The air is too full of words" ("and your mouth of tea-cake," murmured Cinders). "The Japanese have a capital proverb on the incontinence of too many words. They regard a wagging tongue as a shame and a disgrace to its owner. It's only what we know at first hand, what we don't read or talk about at all, that's any good. The best cook I ever had could neither read nor write."

"In short," said Cinders tartly, "you thank God you are as intellectual as your cook."

"Yes, I do thank God," he said, "if by being intellectual means that I've to spend my life in reading other men's thoughts, and being pitiful about sorrows that never existed, when I've got the whole splendid earth from which to *live*, not write down impressions of my own. Fancy Nature waiting till she had a crowd round to admire her before going on with her work! Think if she stopped to ask our advice—what a hopeless muddle she would make of it?"

"And you would abolish newspapers as well as books?" said Cinders.

"Certainly. People wouldn't be so beastly dissatisfied if it were not for the law of contrast incessantly brought home to them. It is when they read what this rich bounder and the other is doing, that their own lot looks so dark. It's the newspapers, and the rich Americans, and the monopolists who have vulgarised everything. And reading is the curse of the poor; it helps to *keep* them poor. The second Deluge of the world will come in literature; we shall all be swamped under it; and the only thing to bring about a saner, healthier view of life would be to bind over every writer, novelist, journalist, and holder of the pen alive, not to write a line for another ten years. You hear of this person and that dropping out of society; if you could follow him up, you would find he has dropped *in* for a good thing—that he has gone back to the land, and loves the smell of the good earth, the natural joys of the country (that cost nothing), too much to return to the town life."

"To be a good market-gardener in the country," said Cinders meditatively, "would certainly pay better than literature; and what a rest and change of air it would be to the poor things, to go out stone-breaking, or do a day's field work!"

"That is why I hate all that printed stuff," cried Bobbie, "for it is fed with the lives of men. Listen"—and he dug out of his pocket-book a *Sporting Times* extract and read it aloud.

"'That mighty organ, the London Press, out of which are ground daily, nay hourly, the wheezy mechanical tunes which are said to represent the great voice of the nation, is fed with the lives of men. Don't forget that, please. Full of youthful vigour, patriotism, sentiment, good resolutions, and the earnest determination (fatal determination) to supply a long-felt want to his fellow-men, comes the pink-cheeked, curly-headed genius, the idol of his home circle, the pride of his college, to the organ loft. In with him—tha-at's it—scr-runch—wheeze—cra-ak—squee-eeze—pu-unch—chee-eese; and the bonnie boy becomes an habitual journalist for life, sans hope, sans rest, sans feeling, sans digestion, sans cash, sans everything.'"

"And yet," cried Cinders, "they want to do it, you know; and it's a great thing to do what you like."

"That is what Beau thinks. Cinders is sure to marry a man of that sort with the chill barely taken off him, you know," said Celia, who had approached them unperceived; "she will supply all the warmth the man lacks" (this was a nasty one). "Now Beau, being a tadpolish person—" she paused, but Bobbie's eyes warned her not to finish the speech. "I mean, that is why you see the cold, refined men marrying the good-hearted, vulgar women who set your teeth on edge," she went on calmly; "it is the inevitable law of self-preservation, for they find in them the caloric lacking in themselves!"

"How funny it is," said Cinders drily, "to see stupid, selfish people taking out their quite inadequate tape

measures by which to reckon other folk's warm, passionate hearts!"

"Sir George Arundel," announced a servant.

"Here is something hot enough at all events," murmured Celia.

He came in, looking grave, but his eyes were brilliant; he seemed more vitally alive than usual, and Cinders' heart beat, knowing that he brought news, and of whom but his enemy Mackenzie?

It was significant of how aware he was of Celia's real indifference to her absent lover, that Arundel brought out his intelligence much in the way he expected it would be received.

"I'm afraid Mackenzie's wounded dangerously," he said; "I have just heard the news at the club."

Celia shrieked as in duty bound, and Bobbie sprang to her side, but Arundel stood arrested, looking at Cinders in her dead-white serge gown, with one carmine-coloured rose at her belt that when he entered, had exactly matched her mouth, but as he stared, lips and cheeks, and throat whitened suddenly to one hue, the rose alone seeming to beat like a pulse of life, where all else was stricken, and cold, and dead. He knew then, as she knew it, for the first time, that the bar to his establishing any real influence over her had been Andrew Mackenzie, and in that moment his passion for her became dyed as with his very blood, passed into the very core of him, and with blazing eyes that never left hers, he registered an oath that by fair means or foul he

would win this last throw for the supremacy in their life-long quarrel, snatch from his rival the truest heart, the purest gift that the gods had ever yet vouchsafed to him.

It had all passed in less than ten ticks of the clock, and without a word being uttered, yet the whole gamut of human emotion—love, grief, shame, fear, despair, pity, and lastly of joy—that the news was not the irrevocable news of death, had cried out through Cinders' eyes, crossed and tormented by those lightning passions that deformed Arundel's face, changing him to the likeness of a devil.

Suddenly she began to breathe, and shame seized her, as one who among enemies finds herself stripped to the skin, then, with a strange choking cry that Bobbie and Dinah knew, she threw out her hands as if to clutch at safety, and fell, rigid and unyielding as a corpse, into Arundel's arms.

. . . . . .

It seems the rule that the keenest sorrow is borne, not by the legitimate, but the illegitimate mourners of the earth, and when the next day's papers announced that Andrew Mackenzie was invalided home, having undergone amputation of an arm, it was not Celia who endured a torture of suspense as to *which* arm he had lost. She only keenly resented the insult to her charms that a one-armed lover suggested; she detested illness, or mutilation in any form; for a person to be blind or deaf, or incomplete in any way, was to irritate her profoundly, and make her flee from them to the uttermost ends of the earth.

And Arundel was at one with her in this; he had the same savage contempt for any unsymmetrical or broken thing, but by now he knew Cinders well enough to be aware that Andrew's misfortune might constitute his strongest hold upon her, and therefore score heavily against himself in the final game of skill they were about to play.

"But she has got him back," said Lucilla bitterly, envious of Celia's luck. "She didn't want him; she would never have missed him a bit, but she is to have him back while others—" she stopped abruptly, the daily hourly strain was making her visibly ill, and her total incapacity to talk the thing out, to share her sorrow with any one, even Cinders, was breeding in her a morbidity that might eventually become dangerous less to body than to mind.

"If only we knew which arm," said Cinders. "Probably Fate has left him the means to carry on the drudgery of existence, taking away the one that gave him all the most exquisite satisfaction found in life."

And if he did not give that same joy to others, what then? Standing before Andrew's well-composed, well-painted pictures, Cinders had known at a glance that he had not the *feu sacré*, that fire incommunicable from human to human, and which can no more be traced to its origin than the exact moment can be perceived when matter quickens into life. Probably Andrew's brain was proportioned in precisely the right degree for happiness, not fame; and it was sheer obstinacy that made his art meat, and drink, and life and light to him; though Celia's

power to hurt him was half blunted while Art came first with him.

Altogether that fortnight of waiting for his arrival was desultory and uncomfortable, for Celia was cross, Bobbie (who was blind to nothing that concerned Cinders) strangely restless, while Cinders herself, aghast at the sudden flaring out of her secret upon Arundel before she had even mastered it herself, lived in a tumult of revolt, discontent, and disgust at her own cheapness in falling in love with not only Celia's, but Rowan's lover. Her eyes avoided Bobbie's, in spite of attending to Celia; had *he* been blind through those ten ticks of the clock —did he not know that only the most violent emotion or mental shock brought on one of those strange seizures, to which at intervals of years she had always been subject? One day she found him closely studying Andrew's photograph, and looking up, his eyes asked the question what there was in the man to annex two such women as herself and Celia? His sad eyes seemed to announce to her her own virtual shipwreck, and indeed, genuinely shocked as he was at the change that a year in an idle, fast set had wrought in Cinders (he had thought her character too genuine to be spoiled), he had never dreamed of such an ending to her town experiment as this.

The only apparently unconcerned person was Arundel, who ignored those ten ticks, and was so really good to Cinders that sometimes she almost wished that she *could* love him, take him as a strong drug to make her forget

her shame; but it never occurred to her that now he hated and loved her in a breath. He was unused to pain; the wound to his self-conceit was deep and incurable; and he raged at the jealousy that for the first time skewered his heart. Such folly was women's business, yet now he had to learn it, and he almost cursed the woman who taught him. And the lightness of their fooling was over; if she had not actually thrown her cards on the table, she allowed him to look over her shoulder, and so the keen zest of the game was gone. But the real fight would begin when Mackenzie returned, and was it likely he would prefer Celia the insipid, to a thing of blood and brain, and heart and fire, like Cinders? If she loved this man, then he needs must love her, and if the devil in her predominated over the saint, then who on earth was to hinder these twain from being supremely happy?

She might scruple to take another woman's lover, but if Celia, so clearly intent on Bobbie, released her hold of Andrew, what then? But Arundel had seen too much of the game of love not to know the many chances and uncertainties, the unexpected turns of luck in it; and no man can ever tell what a woman will do in any given situation, though he had studied Cinders' moods closely, and begun to be able to reckon upon them.

Such was the situation when Celia received one day a telegram to say that Andrew's ship was in, and he would be with her in Norfolk Street by five o'clock that afternoon.

CHAPTER XIV

"What have I done for you,
England, my England?"

He came slowly into the warmth, and light, and colour of Celia's room, a gaunt, bowed, and broken, one-armed man.

Celia sprang up, and moved to meet him, stopping short when near, with a chill of terror upon her that weighted to her sides the arms that he had never wanted so much as at that moment.

"Andrew!" she faltered, and his bloodless lips parted, but intense apathy of mind and body was upon him, and only torrential floods of love could have melted the ice about his heart then, only the silence of a vast comprehension have comforted him.

She held up her face, and the soft curves of her lips touched his with the coolness and fragrance of a flower; his were cold, cold as ice: and yet an honest kiss, full of love, might have warmed them. As it was, he ceased to hold her, and allowed himself to be guided to a chair where she smothered him with painted sweetstuff, drawn from the doll's larder of her heart, while inwardly the man perished for the soul's bread of life, that sympathy which will gird up the broken, and give him the strength of a

god with which once more to face his lot. For a little while there was silence, then—

"How beautiful you are," he said, using George Arundel's empty words, as she kneeled beside him in those hyacinthine draperies that gave her so purely an angelic air; but there are times when a man does not want an angel, but a woman's breast to lay his head on, and perchance to leave his tears there, when he goes back to the eternal longing of all stricken things for the mother who never failed him, and his heart goes nigh to breaking because she is not there.

But Celia felt only mortification that she was visibly failing in the pose of guardian angel to which she had set herself, and so she must needs descend grossly to pity.

"Your lovely pictures," she wailed; "you will not be able to paint any more!"

He winced as if she had laid her hand on an open wound, and she hastened away from the subject, asking particulars of where and how he was wounded; but he had no historic tale to tell, or if he had, did not tell it. He had fought, had the best part of his arm carried off by a shell, the rest had been amputated, and he was put on board ship shortly after, and brought home.

His voice was too spent and weak to express interest; he had dragged himself to her on arriving by sheer force of will; and his nurse was waiting for him downstairs at that moment.

He had not expected to be able, or even to want to talk

much—only to sit with his best-beloved on his knee, his head on her breast as in the old way, and taste the full joy of being once more together. He had doubted her love no more than his own, but her chill welcome had struck home, and already his incompleteness was working in him like a bitter potion, seeing how it worked on her. But suddenly the anger of the petty woman, who, though indifferent, expects to be warmly wooed, suddenly turned Celia to vinegar, and brought cruel words to her lips.

"You have not inquired for Rowan," she said, and smiled, but not pleasantly.

"Rowan?" he said, and frowned. "What do you know of Rowan?"

Celia—hateful as the word is—sniggered.

"Oh! I heard," she said carelessly. "And I don't blame you. No doubt it was the girl's own fault."

Andrew's face was no longer weary, but set hard as iron.

"And you believed this," he said slowly, "of me?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

A bear . . . with one arm . . . and are not eyes registers of stern events upon which they have looked? To Celia, Andrew's were terrible, and seemed to shrivel her butterfly wings, leaving her cold and naked. Bobbie Ingestre was infinitely more cheerful company.

"It was no business of mine," she said. "You and I were not even engaged."

"And you thought—and think—none the worse of me for ruining that poor girl's life?" he said, and waited

breathless for her answer, upon which would depend whether the blot was hit, and her soul revealed common in the midst of her beautiful body, making common all the rest.

"I did not blame you," she said. "No woman wants what no other woman wants. And a man may be too good, just as another is too wicked."

"Who told you—Arundel?"

"No. I got a letter."

"Have you that letter?"

She walked across the room to her escritoire, opened a secret drawer, and came back with an envelope in her hand which she gave him.

He started at sight of the handwriting, thinly disguised, and a little colour came into his face as if he had been touched to the quick, but he read its contents calmly, and returned it without comment.

"I will not disturb your favourable opinion of me," he said.

Celia hated irony like poison, and was genuinely angry. She had been most kind and forgiving about Andrew's little indiscretion, never mentioning it to a soul, and he was actually bullying her about it, just as if it were her fault. To be sure she need not have introduced the subject so abruptly . . . but he was getting on her nerves . . . what did one want with a man whose nurse was waiting downstairs? She had always set her face against looking after the broken pieces of any man—she wanted some one strong enough to look after *her*.

"I think I will go to my rooms now," said Andrew, who had driven straight from the railway station to Norfolk Street. "But I would like to see Cinders first."

He had an imperative feeling that he wanted her, and Celia, glad to escape, volunteered to find her.

He leaned his head on his hand, and fell into a reverie. This was the reality, but how often during the past months, dreaming of Celia, might he have said—

> "And waking, I beheld her there
> Sea-dreaming in the motèd air,
> A siren lithe, and debonair."

Andrew's had always been the face of a man who had never known defeat; he had first fulfilled his duty in life, then done gladly that which he had set the finest part of himself to do, yet presently, after one look at him, as she stole in unobserved, the tears streamed down Cinders' cheeks.

Thus does war give back to us our beloveds, mutilated, half-starved, bone-tired, bearing cruel wounds upon their bodies, and we reckon ourselves blessed if it bear even so much towards us; it is the great silence that makes heart and ear ache to madness—that we cannot bear . . . she made a step forward to kneel down beside him, to hold him fast. . . . O! as she had said to Lucilla, were they not brother and sister *before* they were ever man and woman—human beings, meant to help one another in times of trouble? It seemed to her that Andrew's lost right arm was his Victoria Cross of honour.

But as she came nearer, he suddenly drooped, not against the foolish pillows Celia had stuffed behind him, but forwards, and springing to him, Cinders received his head on her shoulder, for the man had fainted.

Perhaps the love, the eager welcome home that he had missed in Celia, unconsciously wrapped him warmly round, penetrated to the frozen core of him then, for when he opened his eyes (and now a pillow supported him), finding his hands in hers, and Cinders' true eyes looking into his, he smiled gladly as at sight of a longed-for friend.

"God will help you—you will help yourself," she said with trembling lips, all his wrong to Rowan blotted out of her memory in that moment.

"Thank you, little friend," he said, and his voice was stronger; he spoke like a man in body and soul refreshed. He glanced round for Celia, who was upstairs powdering her nose, then back at Cinders, and smiled.

"How big we talked," he said, "you and I, of what I was to do. And I have done nothing."

Cinders shook her head. His was the true soldier's spirit that never admits heroism, but calls it the plain performance of duty.

"And Lucilla Beauclerk?" he said. "So far, Archie has escaped."

"Yes." The tears sprang to Cinders' eyes. "She loves you, you know, and I love her. Since you went away we have become great friends.

He nodded comprehendingly. His face was grey.

"You are not fit to be out of your bed," cried Cinders.

"If you will give me your arm to the door—" and on the threshold they met Celia, but there was no lover-like leave-taking that necessitated Cinders' withdrawal of her support.

And soon he was consigned to his nurse's skilful pilotage, while as the door closed on them Celia vowed that Laïs and Phryne could not have had such *very* good times of it at the front after all!

"There are two things I couldn't do," she said, "for a million a year: teach brats, and nurse human derelicts."

"No; because it's woman's, not doll's work," said Cinders, who stood motionless, lost in thought.

It had been a great relief to her during those moments not to be a fighter, but just a woman. To man the sweat of battle, to woman the pitiful binding-up of his hurts—neither is fashioned for any different work, or ever does it but ill.

"If only it had been his left arm," lamented Celia. "Now he will have to go back to the bar, and probably not make half so much money."

Cinders swallowed something hard. Money was nothing to the man—his art everything, and after his art came Celia; and he had apparently lost them both. Still, it is getting the things that he wants that ruins a man, and possibly, even at the sacrifice of his arm, Celia was well lost.

Lucilla did not see Andrew for a fortnight after

his return, but when she did, she softly touched his empty sleeve and, quite naturally and simply, kissed him.

Cinders, who was present, and whose sense of shame was surprisingly absent (for what was the loss of a poor girl's heart compared with that of a painter's right arm?), thought that he really had no reason to complain of the warmth of his reception, except from Celia, and then the three friends sat down in Lucilla's cool, sweet drawing-room, and talked of everything under heaven save the war.

The proportion of two women to one man can, in friendship, be made to work out delightfully, and Andrew was genuinely delighted to find that in his absence Lucilla and Cinders had become so much to one another; but as regards health of mind and body, he did not like Lucilla's look at all. But he gave no sign of anxiety, and it was not until George Arundel's name accidentally came up, and his recent nasty spill was mentioned, that a note of discord in their happy hour was struck.

"I want to see him," said Andrew. There was something ominous in his quiet tone. "Celia tells me that he has been a great deal in Norfolk Street," he added, and looked straight at Cinders.

"Yes. He came to see me," said Cinders with perfect *sang froid*. There was a something in her eye that Arundel knew well enough, but Andrew did not, and he glanced at Lucilla for enlightenment.

"Cinders has been reading him a lesson," said Lucilla airily. She did not say that she had disapproved of the lesson, but long ago given up advising anybody, even Cinders.

But Andrew's brow, though it was a relief to him not to know Arundel as the cause of Celia's coldness to himself, did not clear.

"I should say Arundel is the last man in the world to whom any woman in the world could read a lesson," he said. "He usually teaches them."

"It was not orthodox, I admit," said Cinders negligently, and Andrew searched the brilliant face in vain for the girl who had sat on the hearthrug, and talked to him. "Our flirtation—George Arundel's and mine—was uncommon. Naturally, he did not want to marry me, nor I him, each wanted to let the other in——"

"You are at least explicit," said Andrew curtly.

"And the game is not over yet," concluded Cinders.

"The game," burst out Andrew; "and what a game! And you looked on?" he cried, turning to Lucilla.

"Yes, I looked on," said Lucilla, who, like all lookers-on, had seen most of the game. And she knew that Arundel had become so deeply entangled that he might even be tempted to pay the frightful price (to him) of marriage, rather than lose Cinders. Aloud she said: "I don't think Arundel is wholly bad."

"Yet it would be a rash person," cried Cinders, "who tried to ladle out the Atlantic with an egg-spoon!"

But still there was anger and even scorn in Andrew's eyes.

"Dear goose," said Lucilla, vexed at the whole incident, "you ask Cinders to do a thing, then are vexed at the way she does it! If you *must* be jealous, be jealous of Robert Ingestre; he and Celia were no end of chums."

"But Celia says that *he* is in love with Miss Devon," said Andrew, beginning to find Cinders engrossing, and in all his life he could never think of one thing and do another. "I rarely see you in Norfolk Street," he added; "where do you hide?"

"I don't apologise for not being where I am conspicuously not wanted," said Cinders; "civilisation forces us to tell so many unnecessary lies that attrition should always be practised when possible. Does not your nurse fetch you home in a perambulator every night before dinner? And I am always flying about during the day."

"With George Arundel?" his eyes said as plain as they could speak, and Cinders laughed. The scene with Arundel in Norfolk Street flashed before her, when he told her of Mackenzie's danger, and now Andrew was angry with her on account of Arundel.

"Andrew," said Lucilla, "will you elope with me?"

"Where?" But his tone was preoccupied.

"That's my secret. But if you won't come to Beauclerk with us for Easter, you're to hold yourself in readiness to go somewhere with me directly afterwards—and I'll bring you back a new man."

"So I am at last to be led into that mysterious secret of yours," he said. "Do you know it?" and he looked at Cinders. He was beginning to count the moments that he sat beside her, and grudged their passing.

She shook her head.

"Not yet. But we all want some such retreat.

> 'A bower for us in the which to sleep,
> Full of soft dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.

And when we find it, we mustn't tell."

She touched Lucilla's hand, and the two women smiled at one another, and Andrew smiled too.

"After all, I think congenial company is the heart of life," he said, as at last he got up to go. His eyes had grown suddenly tired, his step was that of a laggard, not a lover, as he took the turning towards Norfolk Street, the two women watching him from the drawing-room window.

"It's so impossible to reckon on what a man or a woman will do, in the way of quarrelling, or reconciliation, in the space of a quarter of an hour, or even five minutes," said Lucilla, frowning, "especially when the woman is as good-looking as Celia. Depend on it, Samson was the type of all men in all ages, weak as regards women. His strength was not in his hair at all —he may have told Delilah so to save his pride—but it was the weakness of his will that did the trick. He *let* himself be bound because he was broken-hearted at her deceit; didn't he pull the pillars and things down afterwards, hair or no hair, when he got into a boiling rage?'

Cinders laughed heartily, but Lucilla was in earnest, for she loved her Andrew.

"Mark my words," she went on; "if nothing better turns up, she'll not release him. Now why couldn't your Bobbie," she sighed impatiently—"but no—that's no good. He loves *you*. And circumstances are unpitying, and make a net that many a man stronger than Andrew flounders in. It's not what a man feels or says at some flashing moment of his life that shapes its course, but some idiotic thing he *does* at an off moment. It's maddening to think of. Andrew—fighting man, poet, painter, orator—drowned among Celia's blue cushions; a fly clogged in the honey of a fool's smile!"

"But he doesn't look clogged with honey; quite the reverse," said Cinders.

"No—because he has been too ill, too dead beat for love, till now; but with returning health, she will have power to stir his pulses, regain her influence over him. And though a man may steel himself against beauty at a distance, even deny its power, yet face to face it demands divine honours, and usually receives them. Ah, my dear, a man will wince if he meets a pretty girl when he is carrying a bandbox, but he'll let an ugly one take the bigger half of a big trunk!"

"And I would *hate* to be loved for my face, not my mind!" cried Cinders indignantly.

"Perhaps you'll be loved for both," said Lucilla, looking at her earnestly. "But mark my words; when Celia has got used to his being a cripple (how cruel

it sounds), and she takes it into her head to be sweet, and yielding, and clinging, what can he do but forgive her? Some men can't withstand a bleating woman, and it's the lamb that bleats the loudest who brings the shepherd quickest; and it will be Lady Hamilton and her carneying ways with Nelson over again—the type that in all ages ruins the bravest men! Not but that one can forgive anything to a sailor; he is not on shore long enough to learn a woman's whole bag of tricks."

"Personally," said Cinders, looking demure, "I should prefer a man with two arms to one." And while they talked, the very thing was happening that Lucilla foresaw.

For Celia had found plenty of time for reflection lately. Bobbie (just now in the country) had resolutely kept to his attitude of being an excellent comrade, and nothing more, George Arundel had long since dropped all pretence of admiring her, and every other man she knew worth flirting with, was at the moment in South Africa. Moreover, she was quite clever enough to know that Lucilla and Cinders made a strong combination against her (or she thought they did), and they would both be so delighted if Andrew slipped through her fingers! And Andrew was still rich, still distinguished, and the indifference that had marked her since his return was conspicuously absent when he walked into her drawing-room that afternoon, and she sprang up to meet him.

Perhaps the wish to be more lovely than usual made her so, or the hour with Lucilla and Cinders had roused and stimulated him, restoring to Andrew his old energy and grip on life; but as Celia blushed, and softly drew his head down to hers, all the old passion for her cried out in him, and ran lustily in his veins, and his one arm had the strength of two as he snatched her to him. And for a time, in the deeps of Celia's blue eyes, and Celia's blue cushions, he went down, down, and was in love with drowning, nor for the time being wished to win his way back to daylight; and Celia put out all her charm to keep him there during that Easter when they had the town, and the house, and the long spring days entirely to themselves in which to be happy.

But in all love that is not on both sides intrinsically true, there comes a moment when the current of passion neither flows with resistless onward impulse, nor visibly retraces its steps — it merely hesitates, loiters, turns inward, as it were, on itself; and when Andrew realised that moment, and the inner voice of him cried out against his degradation, he rose up out of the enervating softness of Celia's arms and cushions, and took stock of the half-mate with which he was about to burden his existence.

Celia could be the perfect lover for say an hour or two in the variegated hours of a man's day, and only the indifferent comrade for the rest, for only where she and her dressmaker stood was the ground really solid under her feet. And it is the qualities of mind and

character, the trend of tastes and sympathies, that decide whether or no two casual bodies that mutual attraction has set bounding vehemently towards each other, are to mingle in that perfect whole which makes the one and only true marriage, or recoil in mutual aversion and disgust.

But when, being starved spiritually, Andrew's ardour hung fire, she redoubled her wiles, till they showed dangerously as blandishment, and the coarser sort of flattery, while his teeth were set on edge by her pity, for he had come by now to know that for her, Nature, and the art that follows Nature, simply did not exist.

"Your beautiful pictures," she would moan. "Oh! your beautiful pictures, that you will never paint again." But secretly she had her horrid moments, too, when she looked suspiciously at Andrew walking, to make sure one leg was not longer than the other, and at his eyes to see if both were straight, and she longed for healthy, careless Bobbie. In these moments the lovers looked at each a-gape, and wondered in which of them the fault lay.

It was like prologue and epitaph of marriage in one; in its promise, its failure, its sweetness, its satiety, and long before Cinders returned, Andrew was counting the hours to the promised time of retreat with Lucilla, when he would be free to make his reckoning with his own soul, and reconstruct his life on those lines it must henceforward take.

CHAPTER XV

"In a bright manhood
There is no such word as fail."

EASTER was over, and one day in late April, Mrs. Beauclerk stopped her motor-car in Bond Street, and pounced on a man so wrapped in thought, that he saw neither her, nor any other human being, near him.

"I had just written to you," she said. "Be at Waterloo with one small portmanteau at 3.20 to-morrow afternoon, platform No. 5, and don't stir till you see me."

At the appointed time he was there, and they raced down through country that possessed no features in particular till they came to Godalming woods, when Andrew got close to the window, and looked out, and spoke no more.

For exquisite beyond belief was that part of the world at that time of the year, and Lucilla doubted if she had done wisely to bring him thus face to face with the dear mistress whose features he would never seek to limn again; but the man's bad hour had to be faced, he had to get even with his future yet, and she knew exactly where she wanted him to have it out, with Nature to stand by, and bear him company—and perhaps one other person.

He said nothing when they alighted, and getting into a carriage they climbed up and up, following a lovely winding way, bordered by trees, whose grey-green catkins swayed to every passing breeze, suggesting now a Christmas tree all lit up with fairy green tapers, or the grace of the down-dropping laburnum that yields itself to every zephyr roaming in search of beauty.

"Aren't they wonderful?" said Lucilla, who was gay and happy as Andrew had not recently seen her, and who had, indeed, the look of one who nears home. "See, the leaves are tardy and shy; they leave all the honours to these long pennants of closely-strung flowers that by-and-by will fall, and be forgotten, while the leaves go rejoicingly on to a green, long life!"

But Andrew was silent; could he not read for himself? Could any human words tell any such story as the earth was then telling them over again, in colour, and song, and scent, the exquisite story we are sure of hearing once in every year, so long as life, the true and beautiful, is ours? And those catkins, as he saw them, said so many more enchanting things, and were so much better worth listening to, than even Lucilla.

The higher they went, the clearer and purer grew the air; when they should have climbed nearly a thousand feet above the level of the sea, then the journey would be done, but Lucilla commented vexedly on the roofs that peeped out here and there in what was virgin moor, and hill, and valley not so very long ago.

"Once," she said, "there was not a house within miles

of the ancient little hostel to which I am taking you. Then that great man Tyndall, eager for mountain air and solitude, built to himself a dwelling, and to his disgust drew after him the braying, curious crowd. Well—*that* is his valley, and farther away, he lies under a rugged and tangled counterpane of his beloved gorse and heather, with neither stone nor inscription; only his work lives on after him."

"But now the voice of the jerry-builder is abroad in the land," went on Mrs. Beauclerk sorrowfully. "Still, whoever romped in first, got a valley, and so earned the gratitude of all who come here! '*My* moor,' says Tyndall's ghost, when the jerry-one peeps hungrily over into a glorious tract of gorse and heather, and 'Mine, if you please,' says the living man of letters, when the intruder looks into the next valley, while up in the fir wood a wistful spirit murmurs, 'Between the house that I built, and the Punch Bowl's edge, build ye cannot, for it is the freehold of the pines.'"

"I can smell them," said Andrew; "good old pines," and he leaned forward in enjoyment of a scene that each moment became more marvellous as they ascended.

"I am told," said Lucilla, "that close by are marble halls, and gold leather-paper, and the electric light, and other modern abominations—but I know nothing of them. In my little hostel I find kind hearts, and simple ways, and good, honest fare—there's a *Dickens* spirit about the place, and the people in it, that I love. You won't write to Celia from here?" she added in alarm.

He shook his head. He had penned those letters from South Africa with such intense eagerness, *now* he knew that the simplest missive would require a great effort.

"Because," said Lucilla whimsically, "I happened to let out one day that my mysterious retreat has a blue atmosphere—so she is wild to find it out; blue is her colour, you know! Blue Surrey hills," she went on dreamily, as she leaned back, and she was infinitely more beautiful in her plain linen gown and straw hat than as a Chauffeuse or *mondaine*, for, away from the world, she put off the worldly Lucilla, and was herself. Not once since they started had she hung her head on one side in the way Robert Ingestre so disliked, and that Andrew hated also.

"The blue is never far away, Andrew; on stormy days you may watch the indigo of the sky melt into the blue of the distant hills, till all is indigo together, and you can hardly distinguish one from the other. Then just over your head will be a vivid, clear turquoise, the real blue of the sun, not of the storm, and if rain come, the earth dries up as by magic in the strong, brisk wind."

Andrew nodded. He knew now where he was, from what brother artists had told him, yet it seemed strange to him that he had never found his way to this magic spot till Lucilla's hand had guided him.

"I suppose it is the air that makes me want to stand on my head," she said; "*here* we experience an exhilara-

tion of spirit absolutely unknown to dwellers in the plains, and either my body will have to grow younger, or my spirit older, for there is a great discrepancy somewhere! There is my Girt Jan 'Ridd," she suddenly exclaimed, and pointed to a man who almost filled up the doorway of the low, two-storied hostel, its latticed window-panes winking a bright welcome to them as they rapidly approached. "He is our host, and there is my dear hostess," and she kissed her hand warmly to the dark-eyed, pretty woman with cherry lips and cherry cheek, who stood beside her handsome spouse, waiting to receive them.

Girt Jan Ridd was shy—as are all big men of the right sort, and he speedily disappeared with Andrew who stood in need of a drink, while mine hostess attended Lucilla to the long, low-pitched room, wainscoted with deal, whose five windows looked on the perpetual *va et vient* of the place; three of these were set high, and looked on the road that sloped at the side of the house, and on the ledges were red geraniums and homely, sweet-smelling plants, so that at once you were plunged into the window gardening that is the sign of true country life.

A stone's-throw away was the post office, with its warm Brittany tiles and cupola; and exactly opposite, behind a belt of glorious trees, and level with the road, showed the picturesque roof-tree of a great novelist's home, while north and south, east and west, branched four roads, whence converged upon the house man and beast.

Waggoners were stopping with their teams, cyclists flashed up, a nectarine-cheeked Tommy in his stained khâki was fetching a jug of beer, and carrying his baby girl on his arm, there was a constant coming and going, and from the casement at which Lucilla stood, the view was quaint and delightful.

"And so all the horrid Easter people are gone," said Lucilla, looking with delight at the long table set at one end with places for three. "I would not have a private room this time," she said, "because we want to be gay;" and by way of proving how gay she was, perhaps thinking of Andrew, or perhaps of Archie, the tears sprang to her eyes.

"Mrs. Jan Ridd," she said, "I think yours must be a delightful life; always something going on, and you haven't even time to think."

"There's plenty to do," said Mrs. Jan. "Some of the work I don't like; but I don't mind it, because all is right in the home."

Lucilla turned half away from the happy wife; what a simple phrase she had used, but how it held in it all the hopes and happiness, everything that a true woman *wants* contained in one man's heart, and those four little letters—Home.

And indeed this clever, capable, house-mistress (the brisk pivot on which that warm little community turned, the identity of thought and interests between her and her cheery coadjutors, her happiness in her husband and children, and with it the buoyant air that

made all toil easy blowing clean through their lives) was perhaps the only one Lucilla had ever envied in her life.

"The only sorrow I ever knew here, was the dish-lady you took from a minor poet," said Lucilla. "I never could decide which was worse—his poetry or his cook! The purple light that never was on land or sea, had apparently got into *her* nose, instead of *his* verses! Do you remember how she put the joints in the oven without lighting the fire, and retired to bed in the middle of the day? Life would be bearable only for our cooks; but unluckily, when their morals are all right, their sauces are sure to be all wrong! The chef I have now serves dinner to the moment, but that is because the soup is always left over from the day before!".

Mrs. Jan Ridd sighed in acute reminiscence of past sorrows as they went upstairs to a cheerful three-windowed room, where Lucilla immediately looked out at a wedding-party in a brake before the door. They had come here, as on a foreign tour, and did not descend, but quaffed refreshment sitting on high. The bridegroom was clad all in pale blue, with trousers enormously wide at the ankles, and a whole white garden for buttonhole; the bride was one big smile, and flutter of conquering ribbons. But after all, the graceful conduct of the ceremony of marriage is a fine art, and you may dress yourself in vain to suit an occasion for which your previous life has not fitted you!

"And Miss Devon's room?" said Lucilla, and went and peeped into it, and laid her hand on the pillow as if already the head that she loved lay on it.

"Some one is coming whom you like," said Mrs. Jan Ridd, who was quick and clever, and saw everything at a glance. It was easy enough to understand why the great giant downstairs worshipped the ground on which she trod, and why, whenever he got a chance, he took her off sweethearting in a dog-cart.

"Whom I love," said Lucilla; "she ought to be here in an hour's time," she added, and could not perhaps explain why she had not asked Cinders to travel with them, or why she had not told Andrew the girl would be there.

She found him presently in the hall, examining with great zest the series of four pictures that, unframed, unglazed, with infinite *brio* set forth the history of a crime.

Hogarth himself could not have surpassed the humour of the gipsy woman who sat in the road outside the public-house, nursing her baby, and smoking her pipe in sublime contentment, while the back of the old lady who whispered last instructions to a timid little girl, waiting, bandbox in hand, for the coach, was a very triumph of suggestion of the wicked ways of town. Honest Jack, handing cups of beer to the three worthies who were afterwards to murder him with remarkable promptitude, took quite a back seat after the startling verisimilitude of the other figures;

and the second picture was not half so interesting as the first. In this there was no touch of Hogarthian humour, only a dead sailor being heaved (very straight and stiff) by three white-faced murderers into what might be supposed to be a big teacup, instead of the space and mystery of the Devil's Punch Bowl.

In the third picture, where the three murderers are arrested, the only really noticeable detail, Lucilla declared, was the chief murderer's right-hand pocket, that gaped from long emptiness, and palpably required safety-pinning.

"And here is the one that ought to put you off your drinks," she said, as they came to the fourth, hung close beside the private bar, which showed three startlingly clean white skeletons on three gibbets at the top of a hill, and a remarkably well done and suggestive sketch of a wind-blown coach, shuddering away with its driver and passengers from the horror it had to pass.

"Perhaps he was not a good artist," said Lucilla, "but doesn't he bring it all home to you? The terror expressed by horses, driver, all battling against the wind, the gloating eye and grossly overfed look of that vulture in the left-hand corner, as if he were saying to himself, 'Well I enjoyed *them;* when is another sailor chap coming along?' and ostentatiously turning his back on the coach, as out of his line of business. Yet the painter was not considered worthy a frame! But let us be cheerful," and as a little boy in buttons, whose

head did not reach the bar, came in, and ordered in a big voice beer and ginger-beer for his mother and aunt, Lucilla led Andrew to another part of the hall, where a hideous creature with arms and legs that had claw extremities, bat's wings, and horns, was pictured as swooping down, trident in hand, on a hill, in which dwelt a poor inoffensive man who had bored a hole through it, to be able to look up at the stars.

Accompanying the monster, and each with a trident in her hand, were two grinning female companions, who looked as if they were saying, "Here's a lark! If we *must* spit somebody, or do murder, let's be jolly over it!" One could even imagine them skittish and playful, even to flirtatiousness, with the deadly-in-earnest, and unmitigated ruffian they were attending.

Lucilla was still delightedly pointing out their beauties, when suddenly a carriage stopped at the door, and a girl's fresh voice inquiring for Mrs. Beauclerk sounded in the entry.

"*Cinders*," said Lucilla, in a matter-of-fact tone, and Andrew uttered an exclamation of joy as he followed her. There was surprise in it also, but first, and quite unpremeditatedly, it was joyful.

CHAPTER XVI

"Beside the cleanness of sweet abstinence,
Quick thoughts and motions at a small expense
A face not fearing light;
Whereas in fulness there are sluttish fumes,
Sour exhalations and dishonest rheums,
Revenging the delight."

"I WONDER how much punch it would take to fill it," said Cinders in a voice so low, so remote, that it blended with the silence, but did not disturb it. She was sitting a little behind Andrew on the rim of the Devil's Punch Bowl, watching the shadows, bold and careless, race down its giant sides. How they gloried in that elbow-room, heedless of revealing the wild barrenness of heath, and tussock, and furze, though they touched tenderly enough the trees that, clustering to the left of the hollow, climbed like puffs of green smoke up and up, yet paused at last timidly at the feet of the dark fir-wood on the summit of the ridge. Beyond, and on all sides, showed vast and smiling, the broad, sun-smitten campagna.

Involuntarily there recurred to Cinders that passage in "Shameless Wayne," where the coming up of Spring on the moor is thus described. . . .

"Month after month the waste had shown itself a

giant of awful majesty, whose breath was storm, whose heart was pitiless; and now—lo, the moor was full of little housewife cares, cleaning her floors of last year's litter, suckling her young like any human mother, neglecting no hidden corner where blade or flower was thirsting for her milk."

Andrew had forgotten Cinders. Unconsciously he had dug his feet farther into the heather, thus leaving her out of his line of vision, and drawing in a great breath of the clean, wild sweetness, he was leaning forward, body and soul absorbed in a scene almost Highland in its character, and therefore, to him, dear and inexpressibly homelike.

Yet those exquisite green puffs below, those hills in the foreground into which the rim of the bowl melted, and which were now blue-black and frowning, filled his soul with a joy and anguish too intense for outward sign or word, for to the true artist, the promise of Spring, not Spring itself, is a time of ecstasy, of pain keen almost as new birth-pang; and he knew that when a thousand greening fingers should have smoothed to a dead level of colour each dip and hollow in the waste places below, and her bracken should play laughing where now the mysterious brown shadows of autumn yet lingered, that he could more easily bear to look upon it, and suddenly he cried out in a great voice as if alone—

"All that—and I a one-armed man!"

And because he was more spiritual than earthly,

the loss of that which had been finest in him (not in what he had accomplished, but what he had aimed to do) rived his heart in pieces as he sat there, knowing that the ache, the imperious desire to reproduce whatever in Nature appealed to him most strongly, would never leave him so long as the breath was in his body . . . that it must be one long struggle between impotent hand and creative brain, to the end.

The pain that had begun at the Godalming woods, that had risen higher as those grey-green catkins had beckoned him up three miles of winding way to this summit, swelled to a great note of agony in him here, in this spot that was to him as home. . . .

Oh, lights and shadows! oh, sudden gleams, and purple grape-bloom on distant hills! better to be smitten with blindness, than to gaze, yet not be able to gather up, here and there, some dropped petal of that loveliness to pass on to fellow-humans . . . for Nature was his real love . . . pure and beautiful, true and veritable mistress in every passing mood and whim to the heart that loved and understood her. But now he would rise in haste no more at dawn to meet her, and in noontide summer heats sleep sound upon her breast, follow her through the woods at even to some hidden haunt she held in trust for her favoured worshippers. . . .

It was a day of sharp effects of light and shadow, the green of the trees glowed suddenly out, then as swiftly indrew its colour, the pines showed like sentinels black above them, and even as he was thinking that

those hills in the foreground imaged the gloom of his life, lo! a smile from the surrounding country broke waveringly, tentatively as on the face of a child over their darkness, and they were plunged instantly into dazzling light and laughter.

Suddenly he thought of a certain May-day, when, young himself, he had fallen in with happy lads and lasses who gathered garlands, and cut green boughs in the early morning, when the dew was wet on the grass, and joyously they had sung—

> "Oh, we were up as soon as day
> To fetch the summer home,
> The summer and the May O!
> For the summer she is come!"

He would never fetch the summer home again—no, but he would have that memory always till he died, and being a brave man, and at one with Nature, who looks ever forward, not back, all that she had ever given him, in health and beauty and happiness, came to help him then. For it is in our bad hours that the past marshals its battalions upon us, of deeds good or evil, to help us, or to hinder; and as every drug and anodyne we have taken, takes toll of us in our physical hours of weakness, so all the sweet outdoor influences that had attended Andrew, and built him up body and soul, making him what he was, stole now in benison on his heart, healing where they blessed.

Cinders saw the lines of his face soften, and her heart

leaped, knowing that the issue of the hour was assured; but he had not got through with it yet, and it was a mere physical sensation that prolonged and made more bitter the fight. For suddenly he felt that tingling in the fingers of his right hand, with which he was to become so familiar. The fingers were not there, nor the hand . . . he drew in his breath hard, and his gorge rose at the fate that had mutilated him, the healthy, complete animal in him woke up in blind fury, and demanded reason for being thus swept into the limbo of useless, contemned things, dependent on woman's help, woman's pity, where formerly, as arrogant man, he had claimed unstinted submission and love.

The veins in his forehead swelled out, he groaned aloud in the physical pain of it; he had always hated alien hands about him, and felt the unreasoning impulse to strike any one who pawed at him, or stood inconveniently close; and the pity in Celia's eyes had hurt him—hurt him—as she moved irritably, impatiently, in his one-sided embrace.

Celia . . . he had to have that out too, here on the rim of the world, with a boundless sense of air, freedom and light, such as he had rarely before experienced, and which seemed to flood the shallow vessel of her soul, and show him its emptiness . . . for with a man of a certain type it is character and conduct only, in a woman, that tells with him when at a distance; her beauty obscures his reason only just so long

as he is beside her, and while she exerts all her powers to please him.

> "Stars upon stars upon stars for ever!
> Limitless regions! Christ deliver
> My soul from the terrors of infinite distance;
> My flesh from the curse of an endless existence.
> God of my fathers, where art Thou? Hearken
> Unto my prayer—for the waters darken
> Over our heads, and no sign is given
> Though worms make war upon highest heaven."

Ian Hamilton's words, soldier and poet, fell from his lips unconsciously, but a slight stir of breath made him aware that a friendly human pulse had been beating unnoticed all this time beside him, and he turned to see Cinders with the tears streaming down her cheeks.

He stretched out his hand and drew her nearer to him. There was strength in the clasp, there was living warmth in him, else, with all the virtues and all the talents, he had been as sounding brass and tinkling cymbal to the woman beside him, for all the Devons had hot, passionate hearts, and demanded warmth in those whom loving once, they loved always.

And to Cinders, too, that hour had been one of revelation, of heart-searching . . . she had been doing her penance, too . . . but the saving grace of shame was hers, and her late attitude towards Arundel showed terrible . . . what harm the town life had done her, how false had been her standards, and at such a

time, too, of stress and anguish, when England walked in darkness and the shadow of death.

"But you will *see* it all—you will *feel* it all," she said, trembling, and feeling that it was almost sacrilege to look on, realising that this hour in which the man had come to close grips with his life must be decided without intervention from without; that as artist, lover, and man, he had to reconstruct that life before he went down into the world, to live it out grimly to the end.

Yet it came to Andrew then, that real friendship halves every sorrow, every trouble under heaven, that it is loneliness of spirit that breeds tragedy and despair; and because we can only measure the preciousness of that we have, by the memory of what our poverty was without it, he thought instinctively of Celia, and of how she had failed him in his hour of greatest spiritual and physical need. Yet once Cinders had been unkind; he thought of her strange attitude towards him before he left for the front, and he cried involuntarily—

"Did *you* know it, too—about Rowan?"

"Yes."

"And did you find it something to laugh at, as Celia did?"

"No," flashed out Cinders. "I hated you for it; if you had not come back . . . as you did, I would never willingly have spoken to you again."

"Celia told you then. And forbade you to tell me?"

"Oh! how hateful that 'don't tell' business is," cried Cinders, her head turned away. "She did not tell me. I was at Dinah Buckle's when you called to see Rowan."

"I was not the man," said Andrew quietly, and she turned, and looked straight into his grey eyes.

"Oh! Thank God! thank God!" she cried passionately, for now, new made over again to her, was the soul whose smirch had lowered all manhood in her eyes.

"Brave comrade!" he said approvingly, and her pulses raced in joy. "How dare a man whine when he has two friends like you and Lucilla Beauclerk? They are worth all the art in the world."

"And God does it so much better!" she exclaimed eagerly and thoughtlessly.

Andrew started, frowned, and looked with keen questioning at the little face where he found pride, wit, fire, and an honesty that *could* not lie to him; yet the truth was as caustic applied to his fresh wounds, and it hurt, and she hated to hurt him.

To Cinders, the real tragedy, the pathos of it all was, that Andrew should not know his limitations, that he saw vividly only what he might have done, never what he was not able to do. Oh! we pity those who *have* to go on working at what they do well—writing or painting, or otherwise—but what about those who burn to do a certain thing brilliantly, and cannot, whose piled ropes of sand endlessly woven, fall

in avalanche at last, crushing all the heart out of their breasts?

"Did you not say something very like it yourself," she said humbly, "when we walked in the Park that morning? It seems to me that the artist is thinking all the while how the picture will compose—he is putting it into a frame—but we who look at in the original, who behold earth, and heaven, and air as one" (she waved her hand in a circle), "and draw it all—whole—into our souls—oh! we see no frame there!"

He shook his head.

"That is because you bring a beautiful mind to the feast," he said. "Worsfield says the painter or the poet produces in his work something more than is received by eye or ear, or by any combination of sense perceptions. The additional matter is due to a special process of the human mind, and the linking of this process can, for convenience, be distinguished from the working of the mind in general, as the faculty of the imagination. Else, why is not the photographer greater than the artist?"

"Why do you wish for it—to be this chosen spirit, to bear the burden of genius?" she said sadly; "a woman at least may thank God she has it not, to walk alone in the dark that others may walk by your light in the sunshine? The poor know it, and touch their foreheads significantly when they speak of one among them who has a gift, and say, 'The finger of God has touched, and lies heavy upon him.'"

"I can't agree with the poor," he said. "We do not envy the genius because he is moral, or wise, or rich—probably he is none of these things—or for the salutary effect he has on us, but because he lives a fuller, completer life than we do, and makes others do it, a life that we would like to live—that he in a way makes us live—for he tells, or does for us, all the things we would have liked to do for ourselves; that I cannot do—for I can't paint," and he laughed, but with little mirth. He had heard it said before that his being a Scotchman, and a rich man, and in a way the fashion, with a distinct personality of his own, had all helped to create his vogue; but because he so intensely loved the thing that he did, it had been good in his eyes, and he had not believed them. "You have seen my pictures?"

"Yes; two of them in exhibitions, others in private houses. I sought them out; made opportunities to see them."

The silence was heavy between them . . . how dared she do it . . . a country girl-critic, totally ignorant of art . . . for the man was so sure of his message to deliver, even commercial success had set its own vulgar brand upon its value . . . yet if it could be brought home to him that the fire of genius had never been breathed into his work, would he go on mourning for that rag dollie, as for the indestructible, living child of his brain?

For a while he was silent. It seemed to him that all rivers flowed into the ocean of this one bitter hour.

"You agree with Emerson," he said, "who declared that we cannot approach beauty, that is like the opal of a dove's neck, lustrous, hovering and evanescent, that 'herein it resembles the most excellent things, which all have this rainbow character, defying all attempts at appropriation and use.' The same thought was in Jean Paul Richter's mind when he exclaimed to music, 'Away! away! thou speakest to me of things which in all my life I have not found, and shall never find!'"

Cinders sat silent with throbbing heart. Thus had music always cried out to her—yea, and other forms of beauty; and Emerson (who surely had a monopoly of most of the things best worth saying and living in the world), and this other man, had in different ways said for her what she only poignantly felt.

"Yet they *do* speak!" she said, and sighed. "They speak in

> 'Songs that move the heart of the shaken heaven,
> Songs that break the heart of the earth with pity
> to hear them.'"

"I shall return to the bar," he said presently. "You think, then, that as a child I mistook my bent; that I was wrong to leave my profession to become an artist?"

She looked pitifully at him; to her there was something grand and childlike, if infinitely pathetic, in this man who, at over thirty, had set out so late in life to learn, who was so eager and willing to learn, yet who could never pass beyond a certain point.

"You have been happy in doing what you have done," she said. "Is not that better than wearing the 'splendid morning in purple for lost happiness,' that is the reward of genius? And you will do great work yet. Perhaps not in the way you want, but in another way: with your brain, if not with your hand."

"I don't know," he said. "When fate has once tasted the fun of making a football of you, it mostly kicks you to rags before it has done with you."

"But you have life—glorious life," cried out Cinders, suddenly and indignantly; "you are not out *there*, with those who have gone under."

His face changed, and there reappeared in it those scars made by the scenes through which he had passed, scars that had shown so plainly when he first returned from the war. That broken ground, those tussocks below . . . all the time he had been grimly conscious of them, had seen the marks where the booted toes dug out their groaning agony into the grass. . . .

The scene changed before his eyes. Great streams of stern and determined men galloped by, ammunition waggons and heavy cannon thundered past, huge cannon rent the air, the Maxim and rifle fire was like a roaring stream of water. Above the din came the sharp crack of the deadly Mauser rifle, and shells dropped within a few paces, or burst overhead with the shriek of death, Hotchkiss guns banged like steam-hammers, a swift succession of fierce red flashes stabbed out from the patches of gunners and teams; above the

roar came the rap, tap, tap, like a mighty postman's knock, of the Boers' Maxim-Nordenfeldt—a murderous thing that sets a man all in flames . . . here and there little lots had crept together to what had promised to be shelter; round one small ant-heap lay four tall Highlanders sleeping for ever . . . he saw great bearded warriors charging up a mountain, taking death as nothing. . . .

In that light of battle there was something godlike in those men; their faces changed to iron, and they seemed like Fate itself; no company could ever face them and live . . . and the groans of the wounded rose up to God, who looked down on His own mutilated image; all the brains, and heart, and pluck that go to make up a living man, turned into a quivering target for the weapons of iron and steel his own ingenuity had forged. He saw a woman kneeling petrified after they had gently removed her dead husband, saw a man march headless among his companions until pushed over. . . .

Yes, that was like our army. You might slay individuals, but the spirit of it marched on, unheeding. He saw the Boers carry off their dead by attaching two reins to the body, each taking one, and galloping furiously away.

"I saw battle-corpses, myriads of them,
And the white skeletons of young men, I saw them.
I saw the débris and débris of all the slain soldiers of the war.
But I saw they were not as was thought;

They themselves were fully at rest, they suffered not.
The living remained and suffered, the mother suffered,
And the wife, and the child, and the musing comrade suffered,
And the armies that remained suffered."

"Lucilla Beauclerk," he cried out suddenly and loudly. "*Lucilla.*"

He leaned over, staring, seeing something down below, that Cinders did not—a sunny, fair-haired boy, recklessly brave, who reached the Boer lines swinging his helmet and shouting, "Now, boys, we're in," and down he went with three bullets in his heart, his shining head trodden down in blood.

Andrew covered his eyes to shut out the sight. Whether Archie slept for ever under that purple, fleckless African sky, or lay watching the pathetic gleam of violet light, which now and then flashed in the northern horizon, pointing to the end and aim of our undertaking, he was alike happy, for he was doing, or had done, the thing that he most desired to do.

"Let us go to her!" he exclaimed, springing up; and he held out his hand to Cinders, and together they climbed the winding path, and went down the hill to the woman they both loved.

CHAPTER XVII

"Let not a man trust his victory over his nature too far; for nature will lie buried a long time, and yet revive upon the occasion of temptation."

THERE are those who would meddle (and God does not) with the setting of the corn, the going down of the sun, and those tides in a man's life, when to time them by a clock, to thwart, or to check them, is to throw a soul out of its true course to all eternity. But Mrs. Beauclerk was not of these meddlers, and one glance at Andrew's calm, even contented face, at Cinders' brows lying in peaceful moons over happy eyes, told her that she had done well to send them where she had sent them that morning. Andrew was justifying her belief in him, acting as she would have him act, being one of those who "*got done with their weeping quickly, but kept their sorrows long.*"

Andrew was hungry—such was the lamentable truth—when by every heroic law he should have been slapping his forehead and howling, because art with a big A would know him no more, and Cinders showed rather more than her usual irresponsibility when, clasping her hands, and gazing ardently at the contents of a certain dish, she exclaimed—

"Lives there the man with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said,
This is the first Spring onion?"

And Lizzie waited on them like a mother. Lizzie, the smart, the quick, the erect, who had a head on her, and a cheery, rallying way, who was never known to be tired, or sick, or sorry; and who knew all your likes and dislikes better than you did yourself, and studied them. Now she noted Andrew's ineffectual effort to cut up his food, and did it for him, and they were a merry party in the wainscoted room, that just then they had all to themselves, as it was past three o'clock. For the little hostel was a famous one, and known far and near, and all sorts of delightful people passed through it, especially at lunch and tea time.

"We had here to-day," said Lucilla, "one of those poor deaf persons whose existence is a constant apology for a faculty gone amissing. This one, all hung round with chains and metal things, made one think of a torpedo ship going into action. Now why not be blessedly quiet in one's own four walls of silence, instead of straining to catch the utterances of fools?"

"Miss Devon," cried Andrew, "we will, if you please, talk solely to one another, and whisper, lest Lucilla should hear us."

"But, thank Heaven, no vulgar rich people can come here," cried Lucilla; "we always head 'em off, and send them to that hideous new hotel round the corner! I had a narrow squeak once of getting all my acquaint-

ance about my ears. A man found me out through an artist friend who lives near, and threatened to tell, but I bound him over. 'I hear you stop at a little pub,' he said, 'and suppose you have to sit in the bar of evenings.' But I told him I *served* in the bar, but used the tap-room to rest in, and I begged him to tell every one it was low, just to keep them away. What can mere rich people find here? Only peace, and loveliness, and contentment, and all the things that money won't buy! But they'll put up even with *them*, if a place is the fashion!"

"The air gets into my head," said Cinders, whose eyes were brilliant, and who was in those mad spirits that Dinah would have protested against as "Miss Cynthy's wildness." "*Such* a happy day!" she added, like a delighted child, "though I forgot it was Friday, and put my shoes on the table this morning."

"And why should you put them on the table?" inquired Andrew, who already looked almost his old self.

"Dear goose!" said Lucilla, laughing, as she got up from that late luncheon-table, "don't you know that a woman without a maid kicks off her shoes, and has to untie the laces next morning, and of *course* doesn't put them on the floor? And Cinders is superstitious. All nice people are."

They followed her to the window, and looked out at the green bank opposite, backed by stately trees which afforded pleasant shade and rest to many a peaceful wayfarer and traveller.

"On Sunday evenings, the poor people round come and sit out there in rows; somehow in the dusk they always made me think of a row of birds on a telegraph wire! I always long to go and sit with them, it's so much more truly worshipping than going to church; and they have their mugs of beer, and are quiet, and enjoy it all, and watch the house, and those who go in and out: it's their one bit of enjoyment out of the whole week. And one of these days, I suppose, they will pull down this dear little place, and build a great hateful hotel over it, and my bonnie hostess and Girt Jan Ridd will turn their backs on it, and so shall I. I hear that at Easter the procession of carriages was almost as long as Derby Day!"

"Be my showman," said Andrew consolingly, "and let us trespass on those forbidden valleys you spoke of. Put on your bonnet and come."

"Bonnet! When we are young we wear bonnets; when we are old we wear hats. I don't think the most advanced old woman alive would *dare* to venture upon a bonnet nowadays!"

And she stuck a hat-pin into her scalp in her haste to go with him.

Andrew shook his head.

"You have every quality of youth but mere years, and to balance those, and better than those, you have experience. But come," he added impatiently, and looked round for Cinders, but she had noiselessly vanished, and his eyes met Lucilla's, and he smiled.

"She is like a bit of clean sweetbriar," he said.

"But don't you know," said Lucilla, "that placed among other flowers, it kills them all?"

"Their vices, you mean," he said, and then they went out together, and from the window Cinders watched them go, intensely happy that Andrew was restored to his old place in her estimation, till suddenly the thought, how had *she* behaved in his absence, brought the blood scalding to her cheeks. Meanwhile Andrew was saying—

"I wonder what she meant the other day about George Arundel?"

Lucilla shot a keen glance at him. She knew that men—even the best of them—like the clash of steel about the woman they admire, the flash and play of other men's wits and hearts, it is her faithlessness that fascinates them. It is so rarely that a woman is loved solely for her goodness.

"I'm afraid it is the same with the men as with us," she said; "it is impossible to study a good man with as much eagerness as a bad one! The George Arundels of this world are *so* interesting."

"And I should say there must be something wrong with any girl who did not at once recognise George Arundel as her enemy," said Andrew warmly.

"Unfortunately," said Lucilla, "there *is* something wrong about women nowadays. But, dear goose, has it struck you that perhaps Cinders engaged Arundel's attention that he might not engage Celia's?"

"And Robert Ingestre is in love with her too," said Andrew, putting Celia by, and the "too" was significant. Moreover, he went on talking about her after a man's obstinate, one-idead fashion, making the person nearest to him only a cup into which to pour his own thoughts.

"There's so much in her," he said.

"Yes. Her heart is always filling and emptying," said Lucilla. "It's only the gloomy ones who make stagnant ponds of their souls, and try to grow water-lilies in the slime! And yet Cinders has her dark hours like the rest of us."

They had struck into a little path that wound among the heather; the nimble, sweet air caressed him, and a strange, new buoyancy of heart came to him as he took off his hat, and walked beside her; to the right and the left of them was moor, and nothing but moor, and glorious would it be later when a purple breath stole over, and flushed it with royal beauty. Presently they came to that cleared summit which once was ocean, and where later the early Saxons met and proclaimed their laws, and on such a pinnacle may Christ have stood, when He looked down on the world's unfolded screed and the glories thereof, and derided them all.

"And there shall be no more sea," said Lucilla softly, as they gazed abroad, and in the dim blueness saw the yellow gleam of the Charterhouse School, then threw a glance at the length of the Hog's Back and the Sussex Weald as far as the Clactonbury Ring, while to the

Hampshire Downs above Portsmouth Lucilla's eyes turned yearningly, as if on the other side of them was the good ship bringing to her Archie.

Long they gazed, fascinated by the almost illimitable distance that invited dreams, then they turned and read the inscription on the granite cross beside them: "After Darkness, Light; after Light, Hope; in Death, Peace; after Death, Salvation."

"Salvation or—Sleep?" she said thoughtfully.

> "'Though on its brow men sow and reap
> He giveth His beloved—Sleep.'

Can you tell me why, if life is such a beautiful thing, we are most happy when we forget it—when we are asleep? And if death is to come to us as a conscious feeling of sliding dreamlessly into forgetfulness—rest—can any more exquisite sensation be imagined? So we should welcome, not rebel at, death's long, long sleep. And I hate to think of those three poor wretches brought up and up, higher and yet higher, perchance on such a day of cloud and shine as this, and in such splendid isolation, with the vault of heaven for canopy, with the earth for footstool, to look their last on life! And yet," she spoke as one thinking aloud, "they were lucky in not *having* to choose. The hangman settled that question for them."

She spoke in a curiously hard, detached voice, and Andrew turned, and looked at her very keenly. Lucilla's attitude towards the common lot shared by all mothers

just then had always seemed to him strange and unwomanly.

"Couldn't you cry?" he said abruptly; "perhaps, after all, that would show more courage."

"What is courage?" she said, then touched his empty sleeve remorsefully. "You have shown me," she said softly.

"Other boys come back," he said half-heartedly, but she made as if she did not hear him.

For awhile they gazed on the vast panorama, checked only by distant grape-blue hills and downs that overhung the sea, at the embosoming woods, the fields of grain, all the well-tilled, cultivated country that, on every side but one, fell away from the Cross; but soon Andrew turned impatiently from it all, and at once his eye was plunged into the savage, almost Highland, scenery that he loved.

"They say," cried Lucilla, "that in the course of vast ages innumerable springs, welling up below the surface of this range, have undermined and washed away the sand, and formed our dear delightful Bowl—but I don't believe it. I'm convinced that Nature in a fit of frolic (the mountain air got into her head—as it does into mine!) grew sick of commonplace, and, working with a free hand, made that Bowl—just to show what she could do! And then the sky, and the clouds, and the wind rushed in, and seizing it for a playground, cried, 'Behold, it is good!' And they have all played together, and adored each other ever since."

"It is like a human nature," he said, "full of shadow and sunshine, weeping and laughter."

"Like Cinders," said Lucilla, "who is a wilding. And the well-ordered, eternally dressed country behind us is Celia—and quite as insipid," she added, with a little grimace, as they began their descent by a tiny crack in the heather to the road that so closely rimmed the cup below. "But I would have liked to be here in the time of the runagates," she said sadly, "the predecessors of the Settlers, persons who had fled from justice, and in the dense woodlands they stalked like the badger or the fox—the place was a rural Alsatia! Think how delightful to go for a walk in the woods, and expect a blunderbuss to pop up at any moment round the corner—with 'your money or your life!'—and pretend to look pleased over it!"

Now this was the marvel and wonder of the Bowl, that whichever way you moved on its outer or inner edge, its shape and character changed perpetually, and sometimes the sun-smitten country showed broad before you, with a distant gleam of silvery mere, and anon blue hills jealously shut them out, while that which showed precipitous as a cliff in the distance, became close at hand a mere rolling slope, softened by a thousand greennesses as it slid imperceptibly towards the bottom.

"I wish you could see the broom in flower," she said, as they went in single file. "It stands in great gates of glory guarding the entrance to the Long Valley and all adown it. It is neither yellow nor orange—

there is no colour to fit it; it is just as if the glory of life and the sun had got into it, or as if you had opened a door in heaven, and the light had poured through!"

Did he not *know?* Not so long ago he had rashly tried to paint it.

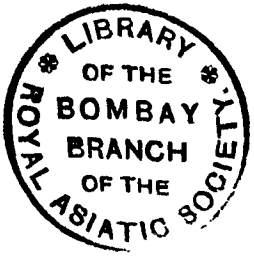
"And yet I don't know but that June is better," she said, "when the honeysuckle binds the hedges together in linkèd chains of sweetness, and dog-roses throw their garlands over all. Dog-roses have a way of their own in growing, that garden ones never have; they form exquisite natural arches, the roses and buds at exactly the right distances: is it the wildness or the colour I wonder that fascinates us?"

They crossed the road, invisible till you blundered on it, and sat down with their backs against Jack Tar's stone, and the curse written thereon for whomsoever should move it; and it was not a pin the worse for being moved from the old road to the new, nor for Lucilla's and Andrew's bodies as they looked eagerly over into the scene below.

"I come up here sometimes of stormy nights," she said half reluctantly, as if she were giving an unusual confidence. "When the lightning has got fairly imprisoned behind great banks of cloud, you see it frolicking and playing about inside, like a lamb in a meadow that can't get out, and you never know when darkness will turn to light! But if I could paint," she added suddenly, "I would paint only wind and cloud. Look!" and she pointed to Titanic shadows that

moved swiftly below, each instant producing as many and evanescent changes on the earth as though it were the sea.

He was thinking what a Boer country it was—with low shrubs of holly, and gorse, and broom, what cover it would afford; and again he thought of Archie. The horror that had come to him as he sat that morning with Cinders, had become a living thing as he saw Lucilla's face as she stood by the Cross.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CHAPTER XVIII

"Direct his arrow flew,
Like the true soul that cannot but be true."

"You were meant to have other things in your life besides Archie," he said. "It's soul starvation," he went on, looking at her, not the scene.

She frowned, as at an intrusion of thought. She had taken off her hat, and become beautiful, her own unconscious self, as nowadays she only was in the lap of Nature.

"When life isn't comic, it's very tragic," she said. "You see that pine-wood just above those green puffs that you look at so lovingly? Well, a man built himself a house in that wood, and he made it beautiful, and it was beautiful without and within, because, you see, he had built it with his brains, and his heart, and his soul; all the very best of himself had gone into it to build it; and then—then—just as he had achieved success, and for the first time in his life was really happy—before the roses that he had planted had come fully into bloom — he had to go."

He nodded.

"It was hard," he said.

"And as to soul-starvation," said Lucilla slowly, "I suppose that if we would realise the fact that life is pain, not pleasure, our quarrel with it would be gone, and we would accept thankfully a little scrap of dripping on our daily bread; but we go on expecting happiness, stand empty-plate in hand, beggars to an invisible cook, and we grow old standing there, but we won't budge."

"Yet it would have made you perfectly happy to be happy," he said.

"I don't know. Where would my mind be? We women mostly starve one way or another, but it's much better to have too little than too much. Solitariness enables you to be yourself, not *him*. Love is so insular. Love sets you in a groove, and keeps you there, and perfect love means a deliberate sponging-out of one of two persons. Happiness may be bought too dearly at the price of individuality. Nothing can be good that throws its shadow so completely over your life that nothing can thrive there save an image occasionally worthy of worship, usually quite the reverse. The best of you all is only a condensed chapter of the eternal old story of one woman for one man, and the man for himself. It is the woman with the detached mind and heart who is open to all influences, those of nature and others."

Andrew shook his head, then winced as he tried ineffectually to cross his arms.

"Have you ever," he said half-absently, "seen a

campanula, or pyramidal bell-flower, hanging in a window—oftener than not in a cottager's? It bubbles all over with white bells that open into stars, and is a perfect type of what Nature can do if left to herself in the way of absolute, all-round symmetry; for look at it which way you will, it takes the flowing line of beauty of leaf and blossom. Whenever I see one, I think that a woman's life was meant to be like that, as beautiful, as happy, untrammelled nature and human nature at her best. But the plant must be suspended to grow symmetrically; lay it on the ground, and it becomes an ugly tangle of greenery, and crushed flowers, and a woman must be held up by a man's strong hand, the tendrils of her heart must twine round him, or she, too, becomes a ruin."

"And most men will not take the trouble," said Lucilla. "They will do any and everything else, but they will not take any pains with their wives, yet how glad those poor women would be to learn! For many a good man mistakes a woman's tadpolishness for virtue, as many a bad one a woman's passionate heart for vice."

"Our bad moods," she went on meditatively, "are always a subject of delight to our enemies; our good ones, of astonishment to our friends—yet it is only the latter that are not surprises to ourselves. And we ought to write our own biographies; it is only to ourselves that we are wonderful, because we *know* all; the world sees our signal failures, not our hourly successes over ourselves!"

"But our friends do see," said Andrew.

"I don't know," said Lucilla, and frowned. "Though what, after all, do any of us really know of one another?" she went on, in her usual discursive way. "Does a human being never strike you as a piece of mechanism set going by some force of which it is entirely ignorant? It has springs and wheels, and all manner of hidden contrivances; it approaches a fellow puppet; its tongue moves, and frees a voice; its eyes blink; the thing is alive . . . it smiles, and frightens you, you feel you must rush from it . . . you realise how small creatures feel when they see our goggle eyes looking vacantly down at them . . . oftener still, you frighten yourself; you feel that you know nothing at all about this Ego, and are indignant at being lodged with a mysterious, terrible stranger, who not only contradicts, but makes you do wrong things. You are an enigma to the other dolls . . . as they to you, save when they cross your path, and you see as with one eye, and squeak all in one key, and because you are less lonely and scared, think yourself happy . . . and whoever wound the mechanism up, and set us all going, remains for ever out of sight behind the veil—*the showman*—whose inarticulate orders we sullenly obey. Well, one day he gets tired of us, and we are swept out into limbo."

"Where love is, there is no limbo," said Andrew, finding her ideas grotesque and absurd.

"Is there not?" she said mournfully. "In some

marriages there may be love—of a sort; but if the two are not in touch, if the hand-clasp is relaxed, one of them drowns in deep waters, while the other gathers shells on the shore."

"Ah! my dear," he said sadly, "are you not a little perversely unhappy? Even those who *earn* love do not always get it. Don't you think—" he hesitated, "that perhaps all the time a woman is looking to a man to help her, he has been looking to her to help him? You are too proud to own that you love Beau, yet it is plain as daylight that in his selfish way he loves you. Coldness may have its corresponding virtue as every virtue has its attendant vice.

> 'Nor knowest thou what argument
> Thy life to thy neighbour's creed hath lent,'"

added Andrew softly.

"I think," said Lucilla, "that we women lock a treasure of love in a casket, and weigh it now and then in our hands, and as it is heavy, we think it *must* be all right; but when we take it out, lo! it is another man's love that lives!"

"You are enigmatic," he said suspiciously, and she smiled. Somehow a man never sees anything not directly under his nose, and not even then unless he wishes.

"I also think," she went on, with that hard lightness which looked so easy, and had cost so much, "that the ostrich who puts his head in the sand was originally a woman, and a wise one at that, which

saying is a parable. But I never was wise, and never shall be. Still, as one grows older, one demands less, one acquiesces; we think it is in the heart, but it is in the blood, growing thinner and colder day by day."

"Poor Lucilla," he said sadly; "if only you would dare to be yourself! James Lane Adams says:—

'Some women in marrying demand all, and give all; with good men they are the happy, with base men they are the broken-hearted. Some demand everything and give little; with weak men they are tyrants, with strong men they are the divorced. Some demand little and give all; with congenial souls they are already in heaven, with uncongenial they are soon in their graves. Some give little and demand little; they are the heartless, and they bring neither the joy of life nor the peace of death.'"

"Like Celia," exclaimed Lucilla, as he spoke the concluding words. "Andrew! *Andrew!* don't do it! Don't put a sword into a cruel hand that will slice you, bit by bit, to death! It is only when you find the cup at which you drink a dried-up gourd, instead of a full, sweet draught, that you realise the immense amount of refreshment, of support, that the kind word, the loving encompassing care, the sympathy that might have been poured into it drop by drop by *one* hand, and were not!"

"And what of the *other* cup?" he said sternly. "We have our duty, too. And you were never quite fair to Celia," but his anger died out suddenly as having

no root in a righteous cause. Involuntarily he looked across to where he and Cinders had sat together that morning, and even as in some mysterious way, Nature with nimble fingers was drawing out of sight last year's dead heather, pushing forward in its stead little new, purple-red blossoms, so was Celia unconsciously being drawn out of the orbit of his life, and the more or less sensuous love that had wrapped him about as with swathing bands had loosened about him up there, in the cleanness of the wind, and the sky, and the sunshine.

It seemed to him that *then* his heart had tried, winnowed, and rejected Celia, leaving her a little heap of colour, and cheapness, and sweetness on the moor with last year's débris.

> "Our acts our angels are
> Or good or ill,
> Our fatal shadows that walk
> By us still,"

fell unconsciously from his lips, and he shivered a little; somehow the magic and glory of the day had departed.

Lucilla looked at him vexedly. She had brought him here that they might be happy, and the wretched human note had blurred the beauty, and turned all the music to discord, as man's paltry affairs will, when brought to the high concerns of Nature.

"We have soiled it all! We have spoiled it all!" she cried to herself passionately; her beloved Bowl would have to be flooded with moonlight to cleanse it of the human stain.

They turned their heads as down the hill came whirling a couple of cyclists, the man with his hand on the girl's shoulder, the afternoon sun shining full on their young faces. Light as feathers they passed on the wonderful road, and were gone in a moment, leaving a flashing impression of mutual trust, and happiness, and love. And Lucilla sighed.

"*That* is my idea of marriage," she said to her companion; "to help—to go to one another in difficulty and in trouble—not merely in laughter, and to share daily bread."

"*Try it*," he said earnestly; "gather all the sunshine you can, and *pass it on*—above all, give some to poor Beau. For after all—" Andrew paused, "the good women of this world have the best of it. Enclosed within the walled garden of home, sooner or later the man *must* stray into the one room where the woman whom at heart he loves, and who loves him, patiently awaits his return. The woman in the street has no latchkey by which to enter that sacred enclosure. The Penelope who silently wove and unwove all her love, rebellion, and sorrow, lived to welcome her Ulysses safely within the four walls of home at last; doubtless spinning was the equivalent to motor-cars in these days! For at heart, you know, you are an old-fashioned woman."

Her lips trembled. A woman's memory is very tenacious, and she can't forget *the days that have been*, and Lucilla had been happy once with Beau. . . .

They had risen, and were standing side by side; they had talked longer than they thought. A scarlet sun with no gradations of colour was sinking through a rosy bed sheer into the grape-bloom of the hills, and Lucilla looked at it critically.

"I'll admit," she said, "that I have sometimes seen a sunset that is like Turner, but never a Turner that is like Nature!"

"Let us go and find Cinders," when he, too, had looked long and eagerly at that western splendour. "Cinders says I never could paint!"

"And frankly," said Lucilla, in her detached way, "I always preferred you as a man."

. . . . . .

When the night was old, and the morning still young, Lucilla came lightly down the stairs, and softly undid the little door leading out into the garden, and passed out.

In that homely, kindly place where hearts were light, bodies slept sound, and if Girt Jan Ridd and his wife in their room heard her, they made no sign; perhaps they knew how often she had gone before, and had no fear for her safe return.

She went out by the swinging gate into the road, and downwards towards the dark belt of trees in which a single spark of light glowed, but was extinguished as she approached. Then she went up the hill to the Punch Bowl, and at a little distance some one followed, pad-footed, and was close behind her when she came

at last to a standstill, looking down on the dim, moving darkness below, for to her it seemed to move and be alive; she could see it as well from memory as she could by day.

And by the inevitable law of contrast, suddenly she called up a vision of one March day, when in a breath, a great storm had arisen, sweeping up in a dazzle of whirling snowflakes that swifter than fire extinguished the budding trees, the young green of the distant meadows, and with magic snow-pencil limned broken hill and moor, and fir-tree, gorse and heather, till every hidden point of beauty was revealed, and all the place was white, and still, and wonderful.

For awhile she stood looking down at the dim outline of the earth at her feet, and up to the clear certainty of the heavens above, then suddenly she spoke quietly, eagerly, as to some one close at hand in a room. "Archie," she said, "Archie."

> "'Hesperus brings all things back
> Which the daylight made us lack;
> Brings the sheep and goats to rest,
> Brings the baby to the breast.'"

Lingeringly the words fell from her lips, but with an accent of painful doubt in them.

"Does it?" she said. "We dream that the milk is in our breasts, and we stretch out our hands for the child—but he is not there; he has grown to be a man while we were dreaming, and is set far from us; but shall not a man be lord over his own life and choose

his own means of yielding it up? For you were a soldier, Archie, by right; one could imagine no other career for you; your patriotism was always a passion. 'What have I done for you, England, my England?' You knew nothing of poetry; you never heard those lines—you only live them unconsciously. Not a word in complaint of your hardships, and thirst, and hunger; and you don't tell half—none of the boys do. 'We have been in a tight corner,' you say, 'but we got out' —that is all. Yet you are happy, for you are doing the thing that you wished to do—and you are doing it well. And if you die, it will be in the way you wished to die —and that too will be well. And a soldier's mother must be worthy of her son."

Her voice changed, and fell unconsciously.

"Do you remember, Archie, when you were a little chap, and I spoke of dying, you said you would come on by the next train?"

She paused a moment, seeming to listen for an answer; then said, speaking just as if he stood beside her, "And now that you are a man, would you still follow me by the next train?"

She sighed heavily, as if he had said something that discouraged her. "You must not be a coward, you say. And of course you are an officer and a gentleman, not a little passionate, loving child. *You'll keep it up, mother?* What did that mean but that you would come back and praise me for being good? Why don't I see you coming back? Your father constantly says,

'when Archie comes back,' but I never say it. They say that 'perfect lives are the treasures of God: on great days He wears them on the finger-ring of His heart-hand'—lives like yours, Archie—it was their dying as well as living He meant. And if you don't come back, and I 'come on by the next train,' you would not ask me why I came early instead of late, would you, darling? You would only be as glad to see me as your hero, Roddy Owen, will be to see *his* mother; . . . what do you say, that *if she* has the pluck to live on, *I* must?"

She moved a few steps forward with groping hands.

"I can't see your face half as clearly as just now when I kissed you. *Not* a coward, darling—not a coward. Don't call me that! But if God puts brave men like you, and cowards like me . . . apart . . . and we saw each other . . . a long way off . . . and *my* sin barred the way . . . I could not bear it. . . .

"You see, Archie," she went on eagerly, as with fresh hope, "you will have been gloriously happy—died in the way you wished. So won't you, dear, let me die as *I* like? It was by sending you away from me, you know, ever since you were little, letting you do what *you* liked, not what I liked, that I kept you. And so for once—and for the last time—you'll let *me?*"

It was pitiful to hear her pleading with the brave boy for permission to commit an act of cowardice that in himself he could not have admitted the possibility of; his was the true soldier spirit, whose only fear is

of cowardice in thought or deed; and suddenly she felt herself alone, out of touch with him, and the silence smote her like a tangible blow.

"What is that you say, dear? That I must give it back, that we women of England must give back *here*—all that you men are doing out there? And I have tried—what is that you say? Not in the right way—in the right spirit—that I should *submit?* And I can't—I can't. I'm not an imaginative woman, and know just what I can do, and what I can't, and it is not a question of will power; it's a sheer impossibility to live without you, Archie."

But she reckoned without the determined man who, unsuspected, stood close to her in the body, as she believed Archie to do in the spirit. If Archie did not return, it should never be in such fashion that his mother joined him; the boy's love and pride in her were too great. And in Jim Lexborough's slow-moving, inflexible mind was planted that night the germ of an idea that, mad, far-fetched as it was, became at last an obsession, pointing to the one and only way out of the situation by which the shame of Lucilla's ending should be averted.

She had guarded her secret well, but a chance word at her own table had given him the clue, and he had been following it up ever since. It was to learn more that he had shadowed her here to-night, and he knew now that this thing had been in her mind ever since things had gradually worsened in Africa, bit by bit

gradually shaping itself into a resolve that now completely ruled her.

The man had been a soldier, and to him self-destruction was a military crime; to hustle unsummoned into the Creator's presence an act of insolent insubordination, to be punished there, as here, by the separation of the law-breaker from the honourable ranks of the disciplined. Better far, to his stern mind, was a different kind of shame before the world for Lucilla, if the world nowadays takes any count of such shame.

"Suicide" (recently said a military authority) "for a soldier is desertion. It is the flight towards the country from which nobody returns. Suicide is a crime. It is the abandonment of one's post, a flight before the enemy. For this reason it is a painful but just custom that military honours are not rendered to suicides."

Suddenly with a sweep of vast wings an owl came soaring through the gloom, his great eyes seeming to demand of the intruders what they were doing there, for the night was his, and the valleys, and all the silence and mystery of the Bowl.

As if the bird had frightened her, suddenly Jim found Lucilla gone, and following, presently heard her light footfalls before him on the road. He watched her into the house, waited till a light showed in her window, then, "God bless you, my dear—my dear," he said, and as he had come out of the night, so the night swallowed him up again in its darkness, and he was gone.

CHAPTER XIX

" But a voice as if from Canaan
Called him ; and a hand from darkness
Touch'd ; and e'er a living lip
Through the mirage of bewildered
Eyes, seduced him, he resisted,
And let the skirts of danger slip."

CINDERS came singing one day into the Norfolk Street drawing-room where Andrew waited for Celia, and she brought with her, as usual, a sweet, clean breath of the moor and the heather, so that the walls of the room receded, and he was out and away with her on the rim of the world, gazing down into the Devil's Punch Bowl.

For whether it were the difference in the way these two women had treated him in his bad hours—the one here, and the other up yonder—the gorse, and the woods, and the shadow-play of the clouds on the green earth meant Cinders, while the hot air and silk cushions of Celia's boudoir represented the sensuous side of him, inevitable to the true artist temperament, but by no means the whole or the best of him—a side that he had come to loathe.

But when he rose from the lounge in which he was hidden, Cinders started back, and would have beat a

retreat, but he was too quick for her, and had dragged up a chair, and got her into it before she could frame an excuse.

"I want you to talk to me," he said. "But first shut your eyes, and conjure up our retreat."

She laid her head back in the deep chair, and her eyelids were sweet as closed violets, and with shades as violet round them as she obeyed them, and departed willingly on the journey he bade her, though how familiar and loved it was, he did not know. The upturned corners of her mouth in relaxing showed her dimples, her face, with its delicate nose, and curving chin, was lovely in foreshortening, and as she dreamed, the magic of the Punch Bowl flowed over her, and she was potent and dangerous, a thing to fire a man's heart, and brain, and senses.

He leaned forward to look at her, and his pulses beat faster; this was not the comrade who had stayed by him (boy or girl he had cared not which) in the bitterest hour of his life, the friend who had given him his first real welcome home; this was a woman dangerous to men, and suddenly he thought of Arundel, and looking at her with Arundel's eyes, the old rivalry between them gnawed at his heart like a tooth, and at that moment Cinders opened her eyes, and looked at him.

"I thought you were coming," she said reproachfully. "I sat there all alone: I will tell you what I saw." ("Shut your eyes again," he pleaded, and she did.)

"The green puffs of smoke are growing old with indecent rapidity; there is a staid young-married-woman air coming over everything (the difference you know between a kitten and a cat, and it's *all* the difference), still, it's a real live day, and fine revels are going on, for the gods are at play. There's not a patch of dark in the Bowl that they do not suddenly brighten, nor of light that they do not as swiftly extinguish, and now they are sweeping even the green of the woods into their stride, as if the woods loved the shadows, and wanted to race too!

"Now I am putting on the clock. I seem to see a glorious purple flush stealing over the moor, that deepens, and in some parts reddens, and I am sitting in the purplest bit I can find, as on a king's mantle. . . . Oh! do you remember that happy, *happy* evening in the garden, and how we strayed out into the meadows, and vowed we would come for the haymaking?"

"Yes."

"What a happy evening it was—and what a long while ago it seems! Do you remember, as we sat at dinner, how the sunset struck the tops of the trees above Undershaw to flaming autumn tints, and withered them, how very gradually the green stole back into them as we watched? And the donkey who put his head sociably in at the window, and no one thought of chasing him away? Then our stroll in the lanes, and the animals we met taking an evening walk? It was quite a family party—half-a-dozen matronly cows, a

steer, and a sweet-faced tan-and-white calf—and how politely they made way for us? All animals are polite at heart! The steer was allowed to be there, because he was only a lad looking after his little sister; and miles behind came a small boy, climbing hedges!"

"I remember," he said.

"And the fowls that Mrs. Jan Ridd had fetched out of their beds at eight o'clock in the evening, lest they disturbed us, and they all came back at three o'clock in the morning!"

He nodded and laughed.

"And lastly, how we sat up in the dear old-fashioned drawing-room, and talked and talked till past midnight!"

"When the garden is full of blue lupins," went on Cinders softly, and closed her eyes again, "Lucilla says she will take us both there. And she has promised to reveal to me deep, dark, cool pine-woods, where you may sit and dream that you are in the Austrian Tyrol!"

A slight sound—not from Andrew—made her open her eyes. The men were arranging the table for tea.

"Who would be," she said,

> "'A link reluctant in a fleshly chain,
> Classed among creatures, when the soul can flee,
> And with the sky, the peak, the heaving plain
> Of ocean, or the stars, mingle, and not in vain.'"

But when they were gone, Andrew remained in the same position, watching the girl, and wondering what had come to her, and why did her apparently simple

white gown take a meaning that Celia's most carefully thought out effects just missed? He did not know that if manners maketh man, clothes emphatically make woman, provided her superstructure is all right; for Cinders was really no better and no worse than when she sat on the hearthrug, and discoursed to him of the war, and all the heroic things that she wanted him to do—and (according to his own account) that he had not been able to do.

While she gave him tea, he inquired for Lucilla, whom he had not seen since they all returned to town.

"I don't like her looks," he said. "It was just a flash in the pan, her happiness there with us, and mine," he added under his breath.

But Cinders refused to be dismal.

"However bad things are," she said gaily, "always remember that they might easily be worse," and while Andrew was laughing at the optimistic idea, and she was joining in, Sir George Arundel walked into the room.

The two men saluted each other briefly; they had already met, and had the talk out that Andrew wanted; and men do not usually exchange their unfavourable opinions of each other over a woman's teacups in a woman's drawing-room.

Arundel looked white and thin; he hated illness, and was humiliated by an accident that was no fault of his own. Moreover, he was furious at being knocked out just when he wanted to know how Andrew's return would

affect Cinders. He had inwardly raged when later he was able to call, and the affronted Celia had told him of their simultaneous disappearance with Mrs. Beauclerk, but the very openness of the proceeding had reassured him, and now the heart-whole laughter that he had heard on coming in, pointed more to good fellowship between the two than the pains and discomforts of love.

Cinders, being for the moment happy, was very sorry for Arundel, and glad to be legitimately kind to him, and her kindness angered him deeply, he would so much rather have her hate any day than her pity.

For Andrew knew the man, and that he had got his punishment at last, had fallen to the common lot, and cursed and hated it. In Cinders' slender hand was placed the knotted scourge with which to revenge a thousand wrongdoings to her unhappy sisters, but as he rose to put down his teacup, he surprised a look between her and Arundel that startled him; the sheer devilry and defiance of it, yes, and its intimacy.

"If *I* can get over my love for Andrew, why can't you get over yours for *me?*" said Cinders' eyes, and Arundel smiled; he knew her face so well, and it was so like her to crow on the very spot where her heart had half broken for Andrew's sake, and still more like her to treat the man she loved with a frank *camaraderie* that had no trace of femininity in it. And yet to Andrew she had looked feminine enough just now with those closed eyes.

"I want you to come and see me ride next week,"

Arundel said presently, and Cinders promised, with a look of pleasure that jarred Andrew, it so vividly put before him his own crippled state.

She had a light hand with men, but conversation was difficult with two persons who would talk to her, and not to one another, and when the door again opened to admit the unexpected figure of Robert Ingestre, she sprang up, and welcomed him with eager delight.

In his enforced absence in the country he had endured many a bad quarter of an hour, thinking of her with Mackenzie, but now at sight of Cinders' hero, gaunt, one-armed, for ever disabled in that world of sport which to Bobbie alone made life worth living, the blood rushed to his face, and if he never ceased to be jealous, he never hated the man again.

Then ensued a scene outwardly quiet, that fairly tingled with the undercurrent of men's passions and jealousies, hopes and fears, when each man keenly watched his neighbour, to determine his real attitude towards Cinders, and watched *her* to find out what her feelings were to himself, and his rivals.

Andrew's closest attention was given to the exact amount of intimacy existing between Cinders and Arundel, whether the man's passion (that plainly devoured him) had kindled any corresponding spark in her, for that look of hers had been an illumination, and also to gauge the extent of Robert Ingestre's love for her, and the chances of her returning it. Arundel wanted to know if her indifference to Andrew

were real or feigned, if in her heart (and now that she saw them side by side) she did not actually prefer himself; Bobbie was watching her every word and look with Andrew, and his with her, and brilliant Cinders herself mocked at them all, talking scandalous nothings as if her soul were in them, the while she prayed for Celia's return. For there is always something troubling to a sensitive woman in being alone among several men, all closely occupied with her personality, and mind, and heart; and she rejoiced when the door opened and Celia came in, cross and jaded from her dressmaker, but reviving at sight of Robert Ingestre. Yet, to more than one present, as she sulkily drank her tea, she inevitably struck the note of cheapness and thinness as opposed to the rich individuality of Cinders. She was like a beautifully-coloured vase containing scentless paper flowers, beside an iridescent glass bowl, through which glowed the flame, and colour, and play of a living soul, and overlooked, furious, felt herself superfluous as a person who has strayed out of a stall on to the stage where an engrossing play is going forward, swords out, steel clashing, and instinctively she strays back again—perforce looking on as insignificant spectator.

These three men, all intent on one another, yet all looking at Cinders at the same moment (and Celia's jealous eyes had long ago seen those beginnings of which Andrew himself was unconscious), two of them watching each other with an old and deadly feud

that needed no woman to make it burn the fiercer, and in their midst a slight girl with brilliant eyes and carmine mouth, equal to holding her own with a whole score of troublesome lovers.

"For ever and for ever am I maid!"

she seemed to say, as she sat in the midst of those three men's eyes, and souls, and ears strenuously directed towards her. Does not all the eternal freshness, and bloom, and power of womanhood go into Sappho's proud breast? It is to the unwon maiden that man brings his purest gifts of heart and mind, to the one whom some other man has forestalled, that he offers silver-gilt.

It was Arundel who left first, and as he went downstairs he said grimly to himself, "Mackenzie loves her, and he does not know it, and she does not know it; and whether you love him or not, you've got to pay your reckoning with *me* first, my dear."

"There is an understanding between her and Arundel," said Andrew to himself, as he too passed down a few minutes later, Celia having scornfully retired to her own rooms with as nearly a flounce as so graceful a person could accomplish.

"You are a flirt," cried Bobbie indignantly, when left alone with Cinders, "a whole-souled, thorough-paced flirt; there was poor Celia, sitting ignored in her own house, and you lording it over the lot of us! 'Pon my soul I don't know how you do it—what your charm

is; I suppose it's the 'come hither' in your eye that I read of in some book about country folks the other day."

"But I've kept it out of my eyes, Bobbie, dear," pleaded Cinders. "I really have—except to people it won't hurt; especially after the lessons I've had!"

"*Given*, you mean," growled Bobbie.

"But I couldn't help it with George Arundel; it's so delicious to make a fool of a man who thinks he is making a fool of you! One is only frivolous and young *once*. And when I cease fooling," concluded Cinders (who had indeed a genius for it), "I hope I shall be dead."

"Fooling—yes," said he, "I never knew any one do it better; but *playing* the fool is quite another matter. And you know that 'come hither' *is* there," he shook his head; "you can't help it, I suppose."

She put her hand before her eyes to hide them; velvety brown with dangerous red lights were they, and could be very soft and innocent, very come-hitherish, as Bobbie truly averred.

"Hide your mouth as well," he said almost roughly, "that's worse."

Now this hurt Cinders, and showed that she had gone down in his estimation. Andrew had noticed her mouth for its lovely corners (Celia had let this out), Arundel for its colour, and Bobbie, hitherto, only to see whether it had kind or unkind words for him—or so she thought.

"Bobbie," she said, "did I *ever* pretend to be good? It has always been a toss-up whether I turned out a

decent, or a good-for-nothing woman. Of course coming to town has not improved me. And honestly, I began the flirtation to keep Celia from flirting with Arundel; I promised Andrew to look after her, you know."

"And now," said Bobbie significantly, "it strikes me that Mr. Andrew is looking after you; seems to me that town lovers get mixed, and want a lot of sorting out!"

"Yes—Bobbie, don't tell, but I am going to run away. I'm tired of town."

"Who are you going to?"

"Dinah."

"Home?" His eyes sparkled with joy.

"Course not. Wasn't Willow Grange put in brown holland for two years? I can't cut the furniture short in its snooze."

"Why are you going?" cried Bobbie suspiciously. "Because you don't want to poach on Celia's preserves?"

"Robert Ingestre!" cried Cinders in a rage, then turned away, and said from near the door—

"Can't you see that it's Arundel I l—love, and he's n—not a marrying man?"

"Now that's a lie," cried Bobbie, loud enough for her to hear, as she disappeared in a burst of heart-whole laughter.

CHAPTER XX

"The Lords of wrath have perished by the blow
Themselves had aimed at others long ago.
Draw not in haste the sword, which fate, maybe,
Will sheathe, hereafter to be drawn on thee."

PEOPLE had begun to talk about Jim Lexborough and Lucilla Beauclerk. It seemed almost impossible, after his twenty years' intimacy as *l'ami de maison*, but this was different; he had become her shadow in town, and he had been seen more than once and reported, near that mysterious retreat of hers in the country, by some local Paul Pry. Lucilla was very angry, she had even an irritated sense that he was following her when she could not see him, and one day she asked him point-blank if this were the case, but though he shook his head, she doubted him. She had her own reasons just then for not wishing to be followed, and she got angry at last, and told him she was as sick of the sight of him as Punch was of the brat that was always turning up, till it became such a bore as to richly deserve what had happened.

Jim only shrugged his shoulders, and declined to explain why her society plainly had so desperate a fascination for him just then.

"We shall become ridiculous, and at our age, too,"

she cried one day indignantly. "They will say you have fallen in love with me, or worse—I with you; and if I have nothing else, I possess a sense of humour that saves my making an exhibition of myself, like most of the middle-aged women nowadays."

"They *have* no sense of humour," agreed Lexborough, who looked haggard and ill. Formerly people said Lucilla kept him beside her because he was becoming.

"It isn't a question of morality," insisted his cousin, "abducting and marrying a boy younger than your own son. By the way, what a splendid title for a comic paper, 'Kidnapped!' over a sketch of an elderly Delilah wheeling out her baby-husband in a perambulator, and saying 'Ketchy! ketchy!' as she gives him his feeding-bottle! It is in their *profiles*—of their figures I mean—that the difference in age and youth shows! Thank God I'm slender; but if you don't drop it, I'll speak to Beau!"

Lexborough smiled, but with little mirth.

"I have always taken care of you, Lucy," he said, "and I always shall."

And part of his duty seemed to consist in being at her elbow when the different editions of the papers came in (he got the morning ones long before she did), and he made no scruple of following her up wherever she might be when some special war news arrived, and one half of the world laughed, and the other half thought them vulgar to exploit a passion in such a way; but perhaps of them all, Beauclerk understood the situation best.

He looked ill, his rather long, high-bred face somehow suggesting a race-horse trained to the utmost limit of speed and endurance; but Lexborough noticed that the eyes of husband and wife never met—the same terror, the same fear being in the heart of each.

Cinders' face had altered of late too, becoming as worn as a young fresh face that has no lines in it can manage to be, and if Lucilla had not been so preoccupied, she must have seen that Andrew was quite unlike himself, Celia sulky, and Arundel so radiant and celestially bright as only the plotting of fresh evil could make him. Bobby thought Andrew was at the bottom of it, and while Arundel did not count, the other man did for a great deal. Meanwhile he felt sorry for Celia, and went out with her frequently, sometimes returning with her to supper. Cinders was always invisible, and his hostess more than ever adorably charming, and helpless, and silly, and it had occurred to him how much less trouble as a wife she would be than Cinders—only he happened to love Cinders.

"I am tired of town and town ways," announced Cinders on the evening after Bobbie's exordium, as she sat with Celia in the drawing-room waiting for the announcement of dinner. "I quite agree with Marcus Aurelius, who said, 'And the things that are much valued in life are empty, and rotten, and trifling, and (like) little dogs biting one another, and little children quarrelling, laughing, and then straightway weeping. But fidelity, and modesty, and justice, and truth are

fled.' So I am going into the country with Dinah to sit in a field, and grow freckles."

Celia changed colour. She had been doing some hard thinking lately; her course was plainly mapped out, and the road clear before her, but Cinders' absence would cause the whole scheme to collapse like a pricked bladder.

"You are going away from some ridiculous far-fetched idea that you might poach on my preserves," thought Celia angrily, "though you are more than welcome to Andrew. Why can't women put their cards on the table as men do? If you were not such a noble-minded idiot I would suggest it to you!"

But aloud she said—

"How supremely selfish of you, when you know that I must have a woman of some sort here, with Andrew in and out as he is!"

"Lady Alix would come," said Cinders; "her brother can get on quite well by himself. At one time she was here every day; now you have practically shut the door upon the poor girl."

"She bores me. Every line in her face—and they are preposterously many for such a chit—spells George Arundel." (Cinders shook her head sadly.) "By the way, why don't you marry him?"

"He never asked me. Didn't you warn me that he never would?"

"Yes, but that fall has shaken him—or something; he's altered. And you treat him so badly, he's bound

to remember you! Do you know, I believe he might be licked into shape yet."

"I think not. And I've no mind to start a hospital for moral incurables."

"You would find him more stimulating than Bobbie Ingestre," said Celia meditatively.

"Too much cayenne pepper in your food ruins your digestion," said Cinders.

"Andrew thinks there's something between you and Arundel," said Celia, shooting a bow at a venture; and the arrow hit the bull's eye, for Cinders went very white.

"I am honoured by his discussing me with you," she said proudly. "I suppose he judges me by the standard of your set."

Celia shrugged her shoulders.

"I'm not sure that the Arundels of this world are not easier to live with than the Andrews," she said, "and the Robert Ingestres are nicer than either."

Cinders started, the hint was so very plain.

"Don't you think," she said, "it's a bit cheap to take such liberties, even in one's thoughts, with men? It's not what *we* plan, but what they wish, that mostly happens."

She got up and walked over to a table on which were laid out the evening papers that she had already seen.

"Will they get there in time," she said restlessly. "Will they, will they? If Mafeking falls, I think my heart will break. And if Archie doesn't come back Mrs. Beauclerk will die."

Celia glibly ran off a great list of mothers who had lost their only sons; she talked like a cat's maiden sister (her celibacy rigorously enforced) who has complacently seen many kittens drown. But Lucilla's unhappiness was a trump card, and she played it promptly.

"If you really loved her, you wouldn't go away and leave her when she most wants you," she said indignantly. "Pray what good would Beau be, or even that dark, silent Lexborough, who adores her? She has a maid who is her bosom friend, to be sure; but she will want more than that when bad news comes, for Archie is in the very midst of the fighting at this moment."

"If I stay for any one," said Cinders, "it will be for *her*. Why don't you marry Andrew, if you can't receive him here when you are alone?"

"He does not clamour to have the day fixed," said Celia drily. "We were never really engaged, you know, he and I."

"You behaved as if you were," said Cinders curtly.

"Yes. Engaged couples, quite disengaged in their affections, and irregular couples perfectly devoted to each other are the rule, but Andrew and I don't seem to belong to either class! Why not change your mind and come to the opera? Bobbie has promised to look in."

Celia was all white and starry—her head starriest of all. It is only when from an opera-box one studies the stalls, and the countless ways in which diamonds may

deform and vulgarise even a well-shaped head, that one appreciates the full glory of a woman's undecked hair.

"I could not sit still," said Cinders, as dinner was announced. "Bobbie will go fast asleep, only waking up (if you thump him) for his favourite 'tunes.'"

"I don't blame him," said Celia; "operas always give me a horrid pain in my back."

"How well your tastes suit," said Cinders. It was beginning to dawn on her that Celia really preferred a Robert Ingestre to an Andrew Mackenzie.

"Andrew's one idea seems *work*," said Celia, as they went down the broad, shallow staircase, "only work. None of the men I ever knew before did anything but look after their women. It's a fad of course, but how inconvenient a person is who feels he *must* do something! Of course all men are selfish and happy when they have their hunting and shooting; that is why at other times they are able to do nothing with a good grace."

Cinders laughed. Andrew was doing his duty finely and well, rebuilding his life out of unpromising materials like a hero, but it was all lost on Celia.

When that very beautiful person, enveloped in an airy foam of snowy chiffon and silver embroideries that she called a cloak, had departed, Cinders walked up and down the drawing-room, alert, expectant, vibrating to the least sound from without, but the Park stretched before her, dim and quiet when she looked out: there were no crowds hurrying through, no sign of the good news that should have reached London by now, if those

men of Mafeking were saved. For this was something more than enduring another great disaster, it was the personal feeling of heart-sickness, of despair, that pressed us hard when hour after hour went by, and we knew not if the enemy had taken that "Cemetery," which Baden-Powell had significantly foretold.

Suddenly the door opened, and Andrew, closing it behind him, stepped close up to her.

"Mafeking is relieved," he said.

Cinders fell on her knees, and thanked God. For noble deeds, for long endurance, for all that heroism which we worship in others, even while our own lives fall short of it, for those who had done the clean thing, the brave thing, the right thing, and who had come into their reward at the hands of men just as brave, as resolute as themselves, humbly she thanked God. Their sufferings were over, their glory was won, and for all time their deeds would be remembered, and Baden-Powell and the defenders of Mafeking would rank with the greatest heroes of their race. For ever and ever they would live in history as men of whom Englishmen had a right to be proud.

Involuntarily Andrew laid his hand on that bowed head, and his lips moved. They tasted the full flavour of that great joy, there, in the quiet room away from the leaping pulses, from the mad human electricity of the crowd. It was a moment too solemn for aught but silent prayer and benediction, for over the joy of the living saved, stole the eclipse of those who had starved

and suffered, and died at their posts, and for whom there were no shouts of victory, no thoughts of home-coming to what they loved; who were "dark to the triumph which they had died to gain."

"The women were splendid," said Andrew, as presently they stood side by side looking at each other with shining eyes; "they shared the daily toil and torment of our soldiers; they ministered to the sick and wounded, and rendered the last sad offices to the dying. They shunned the safety of the women's laager, faced all the terrors of that wearing shell-fire from morn till eve; they starved in silence with cheerful faces that they might keep their country's flag flying overhead, preferring any fate rather than surrender. So let us thank God, I say, for the women of England."

Hand in hand they stood, heart and soul bare each to the other in that great moment of exaltation, of passionate relief, and Andrew knew that if this had been Celia, he must have missed the perfume and the glory of it, that she could never climb as Cinders did to the heights of ecstasy with him, go down into the deeps of human sorrow, be inspiration, lover, and companion to him all in one . . . and then . . .

Oh, then, when like some deeply-rooted, fecund tree, love's foundations are set fast in pride and honour, when from a goodly foundation spring flower and fruit, the flower of mutual attraction, of pity, close sympathy of mind and heart, all the radiant joys that petal by petal are unfolded, till in passing it leaves behind them

the fruit set—the fruit of perfect love, oh, *then* may not two passionate, sincere souls, in one magic moment of mutual revelation, mingle in a love immortal in its power and splendour?

"Love," he said, as if he had only just lit on its meaning, its colour, its beauty, and called her by it, and at that moment George Arundel entered so abruptly that he was upon them before they could unclasp their hands, and stand apart. Blind, and deaf, and dumb, they stood before him, two human vessels overcharged with the thunder and force of the great passion that had so suddenly filled them.

"I came to tell you," cried Arundel, then pulled up short at sight of Andrew, "Mafeking is relieved," he said, automatically, and she could have killed him for coming at that moment . . . suddenly she loosed her hand from Andrew's, and stood vibrant, palpitating, a thing of fire, her eyes vivid in the white transparency of her face and gown, conscious only of a mad hatred of the man who had snatched away the cup of sweetness from her thirsty lips. It seemed the only inevitable thing when Andrew went abruptly out, leaving her with Arundel, but a blind rage seized Cinders, a weight of frustrated longing gripped her, spirit and heart went with the man she worshipped out into the night; it was only by a violent effort that she restrained her body from following them.

Arundel affected to see nothing as he spoke lightly of the mad carnival of the streets, the joy that de-

generated into license, the Hooliganism that showed its ugly face side by side with a nation's solemn thanksgiving: to be out in the streets that night was to see the sordid reverse of the shield of all really great and noble things, but Cinders did not even hear or see him, only as some hateful body that had come between her and Andrew.

An impulse of good had brought him there that night, of hope against hope, that softened by the great news she might at least hear his argument, recognise her failure in honour towards Celia (did it make her less of perfect woman, that in that moment of revelation, Celia had been swept like tow before the flame of her love?), and he found this . . . he found this . . . he saw again that light on Andrew's face, while *she* . . . O! God, how he longed to snatch and break that tall white slimness throbbing before him, blown hither and thither by the flame of love that leaped high in it, as a light glows through an exquisite alabaster vase! A vase that brimmed with love for Mackenzie . . . to his maddened eyes she showed like a white flame, burning pure and high, beyond his power to dim, to extinguish, a flame that burned for his enemy . . . his enemy who had brought into her eyes the love-intoxication, the abandonment that all these months Arundel had striven in vain to evoke. It mounted like madness to his brain, and taking a step nearer to her, he said brutally—

"Shut your eyes, and think I am Mackenzie!"

She started violently, catching the words, but not the meaning, and tore her thoughts from the man with the empty coat-sleeve pinned up, and the greying shadows of nearly forty years and much pain stealing over him, and in his stead saw Arundel, vivid with the pride and splendour of life. The red carnation in his buttonhole struck the keynote of it, the close ripples of sunny hair accentuated it, yet she shuddered; his look was enough . . . she had brought this insult on herself . . . Celia absent; to be receiving Andrew here alone—more, hand in hand, in another moment heart must have rushed to heart. . . .

Arundel's heart contracted as he saw how in that moment she had reverted to her old attitude of antagonism towards him.

"I love him," she said simply and proudly; "it may be our misfortune, and he loves me."

"Love!" he scoffed; "what is love?"

"There is only one love that lasts," she said gravely. "It is founded on regard (respect, if so cold a word may make a basis of all true passion), nourished by enthusiasm, touched with the rainbow colours of hope, blessed by pity, warmed by human sympathy—*that* lasts, that is love. And you will never know it."

He laughed, and at that very moment, as he bent his head—young, sunny, and full of grace—before her, he had drawn back a slide in his soul, and it was a blink of hell.

He had known that she loved Andrew; he knew

now that Andrew loved her; well, he (Arundel) would soil that maddening mouth, drag those white robes of hers in the mire, so that Andrew would never look at her again, and she might come to *him*, George Arundel, praying for rehabilitation before the world. . . . The whole plot had leaped into existence before he next spoke; he had no fear at all of not being able to carry it out; stratagem had always been his willing servant, open force he despised.

And as if she knew his thoughts, that red-flint light flashed out in her eyes, and it recalled her old contempt for him; suddenly he reverted to his former attitude towards her, when he had longed to drown that gleam in tears—or love. Love had failed—now he would try the other. . . .

For a moment he stood trembling, and looking upon her, torn between passion and hate, then he turned swiftly on his heel, and left her.

His madness had cured hers. She fell into a chair, trembling with shame in every limb. A woman who had lost self-control . . . in a great revulsion of feeling she thanked God that Arundel had come to save her from herself . . . herself more than Andrew.

CHAPTER XXI

"The nerve which never relaxes, the eye which never blenches, the thought that never wanders—these are the masters of victory."

"AND so, my dear," said Arundel easily, "you've got to do it, and there it is," and he whistled softly, looking at Rowan, whom he genuinely admired for her pluck, and also her waist, a perfect fit to the span of his two hands. The girl who could go through an experience like that with such flying colours, sparing him all annoyances, and bobbing up afterwards more charming and piquante than ever, was one in a thousand: more, she was one who could be counted on in an emergency.

"It's very simple," he said. "You are to write a letter to a lady, and she will come to the address you give, and —you will not be there."

"She is the lady you are in love with at present?" flared out the girl.

"One of them. But it isn't for love, but to break her spirit that I want her."

And he mentioned the name, at which Rowan started.

"She is a good sort," said Rowan reluctantly; "I don't want to do her an ill turn. I've often been sorry about that letter I wrote to Mrs. Schilizzi—not that *she* cared. And it was ungrateful to *him*."

"The injuries we have inflicted on our enemies, are often more than balanced by the misfortunes our friends bring upon *us*, and I had no hand in that letter," said Arundel airily. "Don't try to think it out, my dear —thought ruins beauty—it's the silly, unwrinkled, unlined women, who hide behind our backs, that we love."

"I s'pose you're poking fun at me," said Rowan, sarcasm being the one deadly sin to her and her order. "But if you want to break her spirit, why can't you do it at her own place? She was very kind to me—and she isn't a beauty," went on the girl pleadingly, turning her own young, triumphantly fresh face to the full light, "and you were always just mad for good looks, and nothing else."

"*Was*, Rowan, *was*; one gets tired of a body sometimes, and looks round for a mind. I like riddles, and Miss Devon is one. Most of you are as sweet as sugar—and as monotonous. Now do as you are told; sit down and write that letter."

"I won't," Rowan blurted out, "for you mean her harm, and she would come if she thought I was in trouble; it's a promise from her to me—" she stopped short, frightened at the triumph that shot into his eyes.

"Sit down," he said peremptorily.

The room was his mother's, as well as the table at which she took her seat, and Rowan trembled with rage and nervousness, for she hated the business, and also, like many another poem in the flesh, she was grossly illiterate, and her spelling beneath contempt.

And it was not that he had tired of her (she knew his invariable habit of punishing one woman by going off to another), he genuinely admired her at the moment and she fiercely resented his taking sufficient interest in another woman as to even want to break her spirit.

But she feared him, for if offended, this silken mannered, fair man could display a hardness, even brutality of spirit before which an ordinary woman shrank as from a visible whip, no girl could have any chance with a man so stripped of all restraints, all decencies as he, and it was by coward deeds like these that he had more than earned his evil reputation. It was said of him, he would slice through a fortress like a cheese if the woman he wanted was inside it, and it was true.

He found a sheet of plain paper, and set it before her.

"Write," he said. And she took the pen in her hand.

"DEAR MADAM,—I am in trouble; will you come to me at once? You promised me.—Yours respectfully,

"ROWAN."

He dictated this slowly; and word by word, boggling at the two long ones, she sullenly wrote it.

"Where was that place you said you lodged in before you came back here?" he inquired.

Rowan shuddered. It was in one of the slums between Charing Cross and Long Acre, but he made her tell him.

"A rowdy house," he said, "or a quiet one?"

"The house is quiet," said Rowan unwillingly. "In the morning its tenants are in bed. They go out at nine, and do not return till two or three in the morning. Before they go out, the landlady is dead drunk in her kitchen."

"Poor girl," he said, and touched her hand. She had hidden herself there to escape Cinders, and thence had written the letter to Mrs. Schilizzi that shielded him, and damned Mackenzie.

For a minute or two he was silent, then he said:

"Write the address above it, and no date;" and she wrote it. "How is Miss Devon to get in when she arrives?" he said. "She will not be there till after nine, probably nearer ten, and she may not be there for a week. This letter can only be delivered to her at night when she is alone."

"I brought away my latchkey by mistake," said Rowan reluctantly, and felt herself a blackleg to all women as she said it.

"Go and fetch it." And she went out of the room, and presently came back with the key.

"Write this postscript: 'I enclose latchkey. Please open door with it, and go up to—' which was your room?"

"Second-floor front. A bed sitting-room."

"Second-floor front," he dictated.

"Now address it," and he found, and placed a plain envelope before her. The quality of it was much too

thick, but that could not be helped; in the flurry of receiving it, Cinders probably would not notice. He made her enclose the key in the letter, fasten it up, and then he placed it in his breast-pocket, while Rowan watched him.

"How are *you* going to get in?" she said resentfully, "unless she means to take you."

"I shall interview the old lady," he said, "so that she may be properly—happy—the night Cinders comes to see you. And I shall provide myself with another latchkey."

Rowan shivered. There are few women who have been ruined who do not try to stop a sister-woman going ignorantly to their own fate. She seemed to see the soul of this man as through a glass, wicked, cruel, desperate—not so excited as remorseless; a soul in a tension of watchfulness and fierce resolve; then suddenly his expression changed.

"You are much nicer," he said, and stretched out a lazy arm and drew her to him, whispering something about the future that brought smiles to her face; and seeing her pleasure, he smiled also. For naturally he was of that arrogant class which prefers to pay for its pleasures, receive unquestioning obedience and consideration from women who can be brought to heel, and God help the man who sinks to such a base standard of company, for he will never again be really fit for any other under heaven!

But Cinders had spoiled him for any one else,

making the right thing appear piquante, the wrong, sordid to him, and Rowan resenting that careless embrace, suddenly slid out of it.

"I've a great mind to warn her," she said; "she doesn't love you, or she'd come willingly, not on false pretences."

At which Arundel laughed, and the girl swallowed down her anger; after all, he lived here, under the same roof with her, and their opportunities of meeting were certain, while that trip abroad in August of which he had just spoken, opened up to her vistas of heaven.

They parted soon after, as his mother might be in at any moment from her drive, though she would only have smiled satirically if behind a screen; such mothers make George Arundels.

But his letter-writing through other hands was by no means over for the day. He went straight to a typewriter's office where he was unknown, and the message he dictated made the woman who took it down, stare and hesitate. But he asked her to place it in an envelope, paid her, and walked out.

"A bad man," she said to herself, but he was so handsome that she was troubled all night by thoughts of another woman in danger, and wished that she had refused the work.

George Arundel took the closed envelope into a stationer's, bought some things he did not want, then asked the clerk to direct the envelope for him to

Andrew Mackenzie. Once bit, twice shy; and Andrew would have mistrusted a letter from the girl who had falsely accused him to Celia that she might screen Arundel.

Then he went to a private inquiry office, engaged the services of a detective; handed over the two letters with certain instructions, and finally went to see the old lady in the slum. It was early yet, and she was painfully and aggressively sober, but having given her the wherewithal to be happy, and a promise of double as much if she were blind and deaf to anything that might happen between nine at night and two o'clock in the morning for the next week, George Arundel went to his club, feeling that his time had not been wasted.

He almost ran into Andrew Mackenzie, who was coming out, and they passed each other without a sign.

"My God," said Arundel to himself, "before this week is out, we shall be even at last."

CHAPTER XXII

"Indeed, indeed, Repentance oft before
I swore—but was I sober when I swore?
And then, and then came Spring, and rose in hand
My threadbare Penitence apieces tore."

It was on the third night after Mafeking, and having dined quietly with Lucilla, and leaving early, Cinders had gone the short distance between the two houses in a hansom, and was in the act of getting out at Norfolk Street, when a man stepped suddenly out of the gloom, and handed her a letter.

With her usual directness she opened it, taking out the key, and read the letter by the light in the hansom, but when she looked round for the man he had disappeared into the night.

Celia was dining out; in the house, therefore, there was no one to advise her; and badly as Rowan had behaved, a promise was a promise, and Cinders had never broken one yet.

She had tried so hard to trace the girl; and she had a shrewd idea that the man was George Arundel. Curiosity, if not pity, would have made her obey the summons, even if she had not been so preoccupied with Andrew that she gave only a detached attention to other matters, though at no time was the instinct of caution very strong in her.

If the man grinned as she got into the cab, and gave her destination, she did not see him, but wrapped in her cloak, and lost in thought, she never heeded the neighbourhood to which he took her, though as the cab stopped, she noticed that a clock near by struck ten.

She paid the man, then glanced up at the house, which looked dark and uninviting, but in all her safe, protected life, the possibility of any harm that she did not deliberately will to herself, had never come nigh Cinders.

Fearlessly she fitted the latchkey, and finding herself in a dirty passage, dimly lit by gas, she went up the uncarpeted stairs, passed a dingy landing, then pushed the door open of that second-floor front to which she was directed, and in which a lamp burned, and passed in.

It was gloomy and dirty, with the ineradicable dirtiness of a London lodging—the miserable bed half-hidden by a curtain; the chiffonnier with empty, grimy glass decanters set upon it; the tawdry mirror and soiled easy chairs; the rusty fire-irons and rickety sofa—all revolted Cinders, and she looked around in pity for Rowan, but no Rowan appeared.

Something, hardly a presentiment, seized her, then suddenly it struck her that there was no sign of a woman's occupation of the room, not one of the untidinesses that the neatest woman leaves in evidence. She heard a slight sound behind her, and turning, saw Arundel.

"Where is Rowan?" she said eagerly, thinking that something had happened to the girl, and he had come to tell her.

He made no answer. It seemed to him incredible that in such a room, in such a situation, at such an hour, Cinders should be innocent, and after a year of Celia's society, too.

He shut the door, and by a gesture invited her to occupy one of the soiled easy chairs, but practised *roué* as he was, for the first time in his life he flinched before a woman's eyes, as, wrapped closely in her long cloak, Cinders stood facing him.

"Miss Devon," he said—and perhaps it was the only voice in all his life that spoke unpremeditatedly and aloud for good in him—"I love you. Will you marry me?"

She looked about her as if she had wakened in the midst of an ugly dream, and found it real. Perhaps she found him ugly also, though a better or a worse woman might have relied on the regeneration of this man through love. Then she said:

"You bring me *here* to ask such a question? Has Rowan been false a second time?" and in the same moment she realised that Arundel was the man.

She moved swiftly towards the door, but he was quicker, turning the key behind his back, and at the click in the lock—and no prisoner who has ever heard it can forget its sinister meaning—Cinders realised the trap into which she had fallen; but she had never known fear, and she smiled disdainfully as she crossed the room, and sat down in a most abominable chair.

"Take off that cloak," he said, then stepped close up to her side.

But as she did not move, he dexterously stripped it off her, and it fell in soft black billows about her knees, and above it showed luminous her exquisite neck and arms. A sudden longing to devour, to absorb her, seized him, and he stooped down and kissed fiercely the girlish shoulder, so fiercely that he left a scarlet mark upon it.

She looked him straight in the eyes as she would have done any other madman, and said,

"Did you bring me here to beat me?"

"I brought you here to ask you to be my wife."

"And you begin with a worse insult than a blow," she said in a vibrating voice, then stopped a moment to get control of it. "And you—*you* are prepared to pay the bond?"

He stared at her. He thought she was relenting. But this was not the sporting Cinders he desired; nothing cools a man's fancy so quickly as to find reason in a woman, when he expects her to fire his blood by resistance.

"The bond?" he repeated.

"In perfect faithfulness of heart and body, in sympathy of soul, in tenderness when in sorrow, in forgiveness when erring, in help to aid me to become a better, nobler woman, because you have loved me, and I have loved you? You are prepared to pay that full price—not ask the woman—as most men do—to pay the whole?"

"I am prepared to love you," he said brusquely, "and I have asked you to be my wife. It is what I never thought to ask any woman. I must be mad to do it now."

She leaned her head on her hand as if in thought. She was so cool, his jealousy leaped to the thought that some other man had tried to trap her before. Who was the man who had shaped her will, toughened in her the moral resistant fibre, made her a match even for himself? For if ever there was a woman made for love it was Cinders.

"So you have met men like me before," he said.

She shook her head.

"Never," she said, "have I been confronted before with a man who has the habits of a Hooligan, and the birth and education of a gentleman. I have met men with all the wish to be as bad as you are—only they lacked your nerve."

He smiled. So few men put their theories into practice. But he wished that she would show some sign of fear—fear acts irresistibly on bad men; and he never forgot that the woman who gets away escapes to mock the man; she who is brought to heel, follows him, whimpering.

Cinders did not speak of insult offered her, or put on airs of outrage; but the wrong done to Andrew, the foisting on him of Arundel's sin, and Rowan's double treachery burned within her as she suddenly looked up in his face and laughed, and the contempt of that laugh cut like steel.

"Oh, you brave man!" she said, "you coward who make war on helpless women, how proud your mother must be of her work!"

That whipped his blood, and he seized her by the arm, and shook it.

"How dare you!" he cried hoarsely; "aren't you afraid that I shall kill you?"

The strain of brutal predominance in him that had served him so well with every type of woman was visible at last, and watching him closely, she knew that it was just a toss-up with Arundel, for a man will as often destroy a woman for hate as for love.

But her pulses did not beat one whit the faster; she had never seen the man whose passions were stronger than a woman's will yet.

"Why don't you smoke?" she said; "it might purify the air," and she looked him full in the eyes. If for the fraction of a second she had trembled, he never knew it, but the sheer pluck of the thing mastered him, and he mechanically drew out his cigarette-case as he stared at her.

"You have no fear?" he said.

"None."

He struck a match roughly, and lit up. A man who is smoking cannot possibly be as dangerous as one who is devoting his whole energies to wickedness, and insensibly Arundel's mood quieted, and a feeling that he had been making himself ridiculous, the one and only thing that can touch a man of his type, began to assail him, for he saw that Cinders was covertly laughing at him: the generations of well-born, careless ancestors behind her who had never been afraid, stood her in good stead then.

If she had only screamed, struggled, upbraided . . . it there had been a strife of wills between them, then all Bedlam would have been let loose in him, but her composure fell like a douche of cold water on his passions, and as his love diminished, his cruelty grew.

"Mackenzie will be here directly," he said, in a tone that chilled her blood, for there is in the inveterate hate of one man for another, a fury and strength so appalling, that women shrink before it, their own fiercest quarrels are such slight and feeble things beside it, and for Andrew to come and find her here was to set a blaze to all their evil passions. She did not fear for herself; she never doubted that Andrew would believe her story; but to keep the two men apart she stooped her pride, and began to beg Arundel to let her go.

Cinders' "way" when she chose was very sweet, and had worsted many a man besides Bobbie; it was by just being soft and feminine that she did it, and Arundel let her plead on, raising a devil in him that she had only partly laid, and presently she saw what she was doing, and stopped, too late, for Arundel suddenly flung away his cigarette, and threw himself down beside her.

"Sweet," he said, "if you will always speak to me like that, you can make of me what you will. Be my wife; and I'll even let Mackenzie go—for you."

He kissed her hand, then laid it on his splendid head; for the moment there was good in him, he was a man, not a treacherous wild beast, and he loved her, and she knew it, as he poured out his soul in entreaty; and

none could run the gamut of passion—its ecstasy, its hopes, its despair—better than Arundel.

But she drew her hand away, and sat erect, her body drawn as far as possible out of his reach, love-loyal to her inmost fibre to Mackenzie, loathing the interloper, and blind to her own present danger.

Beautiful exceedingly was she then, with a loveliness far beyond and above that of the mere senses—in the flame that blazed from her red-brown eyes, in the panting breath of her heaving

> "Bosom as white as the hawthorne buds
> That ope in the month of May,"

the very soul of love incarnate, and to George Arundel a forever unsolved, maddening riddle, for as she seemed to waver (or did she at last tremble?), loud steps came rushing up the stairs, an impatient hand beat on the door, and Andrew's voice without shouted for admittance.

Cinders sprang up, fighting her way to Andrew, striking at Arundel with her whole strength, then, suddenly stretching out her arms straight, and with a choking cry, would have slipped to the ground had not Arundel caught her as she fell.

He carried her to the sofa and laid her down, a great strand of loosened brown hair fell over her face, and hid it, and at the same moment the door fell inwards with a crash, and Andrew burst into the room.

CHAPTER XXIII

"'Tis as though palsy tied my tongue, and lightly
Through and through, flesh-creep fires ran round and round me.
In mine eyes no sight . . . a tremor
Everywhere shakes me ; greener than the grass is
Grow I. A dead man little from my deep swoon differs in seeming."

"CURSE you!" shouted Arundel, mad with excitement, "how dare you interrupt us?"

"Cinders!" cried Andrew, and rushed towards her, but Arundel stood between.

"If Miss Devon chooses to give me an assignation here, what business is it of yours?" he said.

"An assignation — with *you?*" repeated Andrew, white as death.

"And by no means the first or the second she has kept," said Arundel brutally. "Ask her, if you don't believe me."

But Cinders was silent, her body turned away as if in shame; a great swathe of loose, wavy brown hair falling across her face, and hiding it. Upon the arm hanging inert beside her was the scarlet print of a fierce caress. And in that moment something broke in Andrew, and there was burned in on his mind a great loathing hatred of all women, for if Celia, as

worthless gaud, had disappointed him, through Cinders had been restored all his lost faith in womanhood, and through her was now done to all womanhood a hurt that would never heal.

For this was not the first assignation, nor the second . . . if he had doubted, the cigarette smoke brought it home to him, so gross a sign was it of the contempt in which her lover held her. . . . Andrew leaped at him like a tiger, and struck him full on the mouth.

Arundel laughed as the blood dripped.

"By God," he cried, "we've evened up at last. Take her—I have done with her—and be happy. I can't fight you;" he made a contemptuous gesture towards Andrew's empty sleeve, and the next moment, like two interlocked mad dogs, they were struggling together, glutting the fierce passions that for years had strained savagely at their leashes, and howled for such a moment as this. They were not men but beasts as they fought it out, while the woman for whom they wrestled lay deaf as the dead to the gasping breaths, the cracking muscles, till at last a heavy thud ended the unequal contest, and Andrew lay where he fell, and Arundel, after looking first at him, and then at Cinders, went quietly away.

. . . . . .

Something in Cinders fought hard with those strangling snakes that bound her, and one by one they reluctantly let go of her. It was her will that dragged her up by her hands, set her on her feet, and gave her sight with which to dare to look about her.

The broken door swung open; Arundel was gone; Andrew beginning to stir where he had fallen stunned in that last throw; and Cinders realised that, in the one situation of her life when it was of the most vital importance she should have her wits about her, had come one of those moments when brain and body were off-guard, did not work properly, as when the driver of an express train sees the signals against him, but dashes on because nothing warns him—his brain-mechanism, like the bodily one, is out of gear, has stopped, and hurls him and all with him to destruction.

She could not imagine how she had held her own with Arundel: she supposed it was because she had not for one moment known fear, but she was pitifully weak now as she dragged herself to Andrew, and sitting down on the floor, sought to raise him. And the first use he made of the recovery of his senses was to pull himself away from her, and struggle to his feet.

She rose also, and pale and exhausted, swayed as she stood, her gown torn, and soiled with dust, a broken image to him of the dear ideal that he had once loved, and his eyes were terrible as he looked at her, saying no word.

"Thank God that you came, Andrew!" she said, her voice seeming to fight its way through that heavy silence, and when she saw at what he was looking, she put up her hand involuntarily as if to hide it.

Oh! it would have seemed incredible—this situation, had he not known what Arundel's power over women

was. For he believed that she loved the man—had fought his devilish attraction, and failed, as many a bright, and good, and lovely woman had done before her. The evil women he always let alone; they knew him, and he them, and neither meddled the one with the other: hawks do not pick out hawks' e'en.

"Why do you look at me so strangely?" she said proudly, and lifted her arms to bind up the hair that her struggle with Arundel had loosened.

He made a gesture as if he could have struck her.

"How long have you been here to-night?" he said roughly, then took her by the shoulders, and wheeled her round towards the light, looking with fierce scrutiny in her eyes.

"Close on two hours."

"Oh, shameless! It is not the first or the second time that you have been here," and he spoke with a savage, leaping rage and jealousy that startled even himself, but it was the lifelong hatred of the clean man for the unclean; of the man who had always put a woman's happiness first, and his own after, yet who now saw filched from him the one cherished blossom he coveted, by the scoundrel who had gone through the garden of womanhood, plucking and devastating at will.

"You did not speak, or deny it when Arundel was here; you hid your face away, and lay there ashamed, but you cannot hide the mark of his kiss on your arm, you cannot hide—" he stopped as Cinders lifted her head, and looked at him silently, at once too proud, too

physically broken, to defend herself. Oh! had she not sat beside him in his bad hour, and as she had understood him, could not he *her?* She had not cast him out because of Rowan, and she thought of that solemn Mafeking hour they had shared together . . . but was it not like a man that in this, the most awful, incredible situation that could befal a woman, he should hopelessly misjudge her? And, indeed, the disloyalty of man to woman must always be an affrighting experience to a perfectly faithful heart.

Cinders looked him full in the eyes, and if ever a great love went nigh to dying, it was in that moment.

"I cannot and will not explain," she said proudly. But to his fine ear there was the sound in her voice that told him she felt as he had done, when something snapped within him.

"The letter that brought me here says, '*Where they often meet,*'" said Andrew. "I did not believe it—I came here to prove it a lie."

Cinders stood silent; eyes and body so eloquent that for a moment he stopped, listening, but she did not speak.

"Would you have me disbelieve the evidence of my own eyes and ears?" he cried. "I find you here alone with Arundel in such a house, in such a neighbourhood. I enter to find you hiding your face in shame instead of explaining the situation."

"Let me pass," she said, with blazing eyes, but he did not stir.

"Where are you going?"

"Are you afraid that I shall corrupt Celia?" she said. "I don't think I could hurt her much. She didn't mind a bit about Rowan, you know. But if you are afraid, I can go to Lucilla."

"Poor girl — poor child!" groaned out Andrew. "Perhaps if I had warned you——"

"Maidens' instincts and maidens' hearts were made before a libertine's wiles," said Cinders proudly, "and a good woman is a match for the worst man that ever lived. Do you think virtue is a robe that a woman slips on and off at pleasure? If I could not feel as safe with a man at midnight on a desert island, as at midday in a public street, I would be ashamed to call myself a woman. Don't you know that for a girl never to make a single mistake is to have a most intimate knowledge of evil? That mistake I made in coming here to-night."

For a moment he saw her only with that half-pathetic, half-scornful innocence, which yet was not ignorance, but the evidence was too irrefragable, and he looked around him with a shudder. It was like some horrible, sordid French play.

And suddenly Cinders' heart contracted, Andrew looked so old, and tired, and broken, and like a flash some forgotten words of Lucilla's recurred to her—

"Ah, my dear, what matters it to change our religion, when one has lost all one's illusions?"

For Andrew had lost all his that night, and did he

realise that the greatest good that had ever come into his life was passing away from him, as Cinders, bending her head to hide her tears, went swiftly out?

A grimy shadow drew back as she went down the stairs. The air blew freshly on her face as she opened the front door, and close by, a clock struck twelve. Afterwards she supposed that it was Andrew who found a hansom, and placed her in it, but they exchanged no word, nor did she know that he followed her in another. Celia had not returned from a poker party when she got in, and at last Cinders was alone.

CHAPTER XXIV

"Never the lotus closes, never the wild-fowl wake,
But a soul went out on the east wind, that died for England's sake—
Man or woman or suckling, mother or bride or maid—
Because on the bones of the English, the English flag is stayed."

ONE nail drives out another, and in less than twelve hours Cinders was caught in such a wave of tragedy as completely swallowed up all her own troubles, for the event that Lucilla had all along foreseen occurred, and the midday papers announced that Archie had been killed in action the preceding day.

Cinders saw the name in the fatal list, snatched her hat, and sobbing under her breath as she had never sobbed for herself, ran out into the street, jumped into the first hansom she met, and, on turning the corner into Berkeley Square, saw in the distance Lucilla issue from her house, half led, half carried by Lexborough, and, followed by her uncloaked, unbonneted, elderly maid, drive swiftly away.

There was something of sinister haste and hurry in the proceeding that alarmed Cinders, and through the trapdoor she ordered the cabman to follow on, so that the men-servants, who stood with oddly-startled faces on the doorstep looking after the carriage, did not see her pass.

What did their mistress's departure with Lord Lex-

borough mean, less than a quarter of an hour after he had come to break to her the news? She had neither wept nor fainted, but had gone straight to her room, and he had followed her there, and almost instantly brought her away.

It seemed to have no more occurred to Lucilla to go to Beauclerk, than to Beauclerk to go to Lucilla, and this was past the comprehension of the butler, who was a family man, and did not understand such ways.

But the men's faces were danger-signals, and in a moment of divination, Cinders knew that badly as she had wanted help last night, Lucilla was never in such need of a woman to save her from herself as now, though Cinders cast a backward glance at the lonely man by whose side his wife should surely have stood at such a moment as this. It is the lookers-on who see most of the game, and though Lexborough's present act seemed that of a madman, Cinders, who had watched him closely of late, was not surprised, and Beauclerk showed as an ally, Jim as a deadly enemy who must be fought and worsted, if Archie's mother were to remain worthy of the name.

The cabman was clever, and a skilful driver, and he kept his quarry in sight till he ran it to earth in Jermyn Street, getting so near that Cinders saw Jim lift out Lucilla, and take her, followed by the woman, into a house of which the door flew open at their approach. Mrs. Beauclerk had two maids, and the one with her was the Mrs. Frobisher of the household who had been with her from childhood, and a maid often knows her

mistress a great deal better than her master does—certainly this one did.

Cinders paid the cabman, and walked slowly towards the house they had entered, but for once common sense had her by the ear, and made her listen.

If Lexborough meant harm, he might resent her presence here, even refuse access to Lucilla; he had acted with such rapidity that it would never occur to him that he had been instantly followed, and thinking thus, and having already passed the house, suddenly she heard a door slam, and looking back, saw him come out, give some orders to his coachman, then jump into a hansom, and drive away.

Now was her opportunity, and her heart beat thick and fast as she rang at the bell, and asked the middle-aged servant who opened the door to take her up at once to Mrs. Beauclerk, and to her surprise, the man stood aside immediately for her to enter; evidently there was no secrecy about Lucilla's presence here.

"The poor lady has had bad news of her son," said the man; "she is in the drawing-room."

Cinders flew up the stairs, guided by the sound of her friend's voice, that ran on and on, all in one key, and her heart failed her. Had a worse thing than death befallen poor Lucilla—had the long strain, the final shock, told on her at last, and she was mad?

"I was not quick enough," she was saying; "why did you not keep the door as I bade you? Another moment, just one—for I am a dead shot now, and know the exact spot on my temple—and it would have

been over. I've been learning and practising for weeks past at a shooting-gallery; oh! cruel, cruel!"

"You should have locked the door inside," said a grim voice. "I thought you *had* locked it. I stood before it, and stretched my arms out before it, and fought him when he came. 'What is she doing?' he said. 'She is in there, killing herself,' I said; and I prayed aloud, O God! let it be soon over—let it be soon over, O God! and he cursed me, and brushed me aside as if I were a fly, and he struck the pistol out of your hand. '*For Archie's sake!*' he said, and then you fell to trembling, and I was shaking too, and could neither let nor hinder you; and then he dressed and veiled you as if you were a child, and he your nurse, and hurried you down the stairs, and out of the house, and, without cloak or bonnet, I followed you. I'm none so sure that Mr. Jim wishes you well—and I've been an hysterical fool for the first time in my life. Miss 'Cilla, I'd best take you home."

Lucilla shivered. "It's so *cold* there," she said. "I had thought it all out. Some women sit down, and are wailed, and dripped over, and some turn religious, just as if they had a past, and some take a lover, or morphia, and go to the bad, but I'd only one chance, to go and nurse people at Whitechapel, or die. So I chose a clean death. I came with Jim, for Archie's sake; they don't keep out wicked women, he says, only suicides. And he knew if he left me to Beau I should do it; the first moment I got to myself alone I should do it; and you mustn't do it, Jim says. He's a soldier,

you see, like Archie, and a soldier's mother must be as brave as her son. She mustn't shame him; and I seem to see him looking, and watching for me, and he frowns, and says gravely, 'Mother, why did you come before you were called? It's a breach of discipline.' And I would go through any mill in this world to be sure of being allowed to join him *there*."

And still Cinders leaned against the lintel, sheer terror of seeing that poor mother's face binding her hand and foot where she stood.

The crazed voice ran on. Oh! how sweet had been the plash of weeping to that dry, hard monotony of sound!

"I've been punished all the way through—punished in my pride, in my love—I was hit hardest through love, because I valued it most. Oh! God isn't a mother, or He might take pity on poor women who have *only* that one child, and forgive her for setting out to look for him? Archie would have done it for me. 'If you had died, I would have come on by the next train,' he said when he was a little chap."

Cinders' tears rained down.

"And Jim asks me to *live*, to go to bed, to wake at night, to get up each morning, knowing that never *here* Archie will come home again. . . . I 'shall go to him, but he will not return to me.' There is all the sorrow of all the mothers since the world began in those words—it did not say *her*, it said *him*; . . . but Jim won't let me go. I was so greedy, I counted the moments that he sat beside me. I kept him by sending him away from me; other women lose their sons by keeping

them at their sides, and he was always glad to come back—my boy, my boy." . . .

Cinders shuddered at that personal note . . . that moment when the living press close, and change as we cling to them into the icy dead; when in the physical agony the truth comes home to us . . . it was to avoid that moment, that bottomless pit, that Lucilla had taken pistol in hand; she knew what she fought at arm's length, knew that she had not strength to face the everlasting silence and emptiness

"Where thou didst never come."

Cinders pushed the door wide, and ran to Lucilla, and tried to blind those poor eyes on her breast.

But Lucilla thrust her away.

"Do you know what I have done?" she said. "I have come away with Jim, so that—so that—I shall not lose Archie."

"Oh!" cried Cinders, wincing at sight of that stricken face, "Archie loved his father; what would he say to your deserting him at such an hour as this?"

Lucilla looked at her vacantly. Unconsciously to herself, the whole great fraud of Beauclerk's life towards her had reaped its reward in total bankruptcy in the hour of her greatest need, and the man had not counted, simply had not counted in her thoughts, but now a troubled look spread over her features, and she twisted her hands pitifully together.

"Oh! do you grudge it to Archie," Cinders said, with her arms clasped about that frail shape, "that he

has died the death that he would have chosen? You were going to kill yourself *because the boy had done what he wanted to do;* you should have killed yourself if he had not; and he had such *luck!* To die fighting, and not by fever! Thank God for that, as you may be sure *he* did. Is it for him you lament, or for yourself?"

"For both; for the young life cut short, for mine that is left."

"How selfish he would think you," cried Cinders warmly. "How angry he would be that you were a *coward,* and sought to quench his glory in your tears."

"Tears!" said poor Lucilla. "Oh, I have no tears; I cannot weep."

"No!" (and Cinders wept herself). "Because if you could weep, you would not be mad; you would not have come away with Lexborough. Weep," she cried in heart-broken tones, "poor soul, weep! Loose a sea of tears, and drown yourself in them; but let it be for joy that you have brought a man-child into the world who has done his duty, and whom you have never tried to hold back from doing that duty.

> 'How sleep the brave who sink to rest
> By all the country's wishes blest?
> When Spring with dewy fingers cold
> Returns to deck the hallowed mould,
> She then shall dress a sweeter sod
> Than fancy's feet has ever trod.'"

There were tears in Cinders' voice, but none in Lucilla's eyes as she listened. The hand had not yet struck the flinty rock of her heart that should make the waters gush forth.

"You have prided yourself on your hardness," said Cinders, unfalteringly, "and you cannot go against Nature always, and not pay. Beauclerk is your boy's father, and Archie loved him. How do you know that he is not at this moment taking his own life because *he* is a—coward, like you? His loss is as great as yours. To desert him at such a time . . . oh! how base . . . and Archie loved *you*."

Lucilla quivered, as she always did, to the lash of duty, and into her look came something more human.

"Do we not love you—Andrew and I? You love her too," and she turned eagerly to Mrs. Frobisher.

Mrs. Frobisher, long, lean, with a sagacious horse-face, had been looking intently at Cinders, weighing her, and now she nodded.

"Yes, Miss," she said deliberately. "If there's any third way between my mistress's death or her dishonour, I shall be glad to know it." She believed Lucilla physically incapable of living without Archie under the existing home conditions, but perhaps this girl was strong enough, and resolute enough, to carry that third way.

"I hate your faces, every one," said Lucilla suddenly. "I hate your voices. I want Archie. Just to touch him satisfied all my heart, and soul, and body. I never really lived except with him; and you might make me promise, but if you left me to myself . . ."

"'Keep it up, mother,' the boy is saying to you now," pleaded Cinders. "And if you break down now, how can you face him? He would be so ashamed of you.

And have you not been a little hard—selfish, even—towards your husband?" went on Cinders. "If you could have dropped self, wiped it out, you might have influenced him, perhaps . . . but you threw yourself into the world—you *pretended*. Oh! it's simplicity that tells, that a man understands! Perhaps if you *hadn't* pretended—if you had been sincere with him—let him see you loved him—it might have been different. And it hurts so, the Gospel of Hate," she added sadly. "In the Gospel of Love are a thousand lovely and tender usages, and ways, and words."

"The Gospel of Hate?" said Lucilla, in that strange colourless voice, as if it spoke outside a frozen consciousness that feared to waken.

"Yes," said Cinders sadly, "you have a grudge against him; I don't know what it is, but nothing is worth it—to *hate*. It is to look at life through a distorted lens, that makes the most beautiful things the most misshapen of all. I have always loved and understood you, but I never knew you as *your true self*. We are all more willing to love than to hate; throw us but a grain, and we leap at it, and plant it, and grow it to a tree. We all starve for love; but if we don't cry out, we get hard and bitter. The Book says, 'Let not the sun go down upon your wrath;' what does *that* mean but to live the Gospel of Love? Oh! the woman who never stoops her pride to what she loves, comes to beg hardest in the long run!

'Quarrel or reprimand,
'Twill soon be dark!'

What if you went home to find it already dark with *him?*"

"I want Jim," said Lucilla restlessly, as if she feared an influence inimical to the purpose in her mind, longed for the strong support that had just now been round her. The mere physical touch of him had been a comfort; to be borne on the rush of this rough, masculine, dominant power was a rest, and almost a happiness. She had stood so alone always that just to have a man's shoulder to lean her head against, to have a man to think for her, was to take sanctuary.

"You know how clean Archie's life was," said Cinders sternly; "how he loathed lightness in women; how much of your influence over him was because he knew how pure your life was, though you were left so entirely alone? He loved you all the more to make up for it. And he loved his father. How will you face him when he says to you, 'Mother, where is my poor old dad?' How can you be Beau's wife and Lexborough's also?"

Lucilla drew a deep breath, and her eyes dilated.

"You would for ever separate yourself from him by your act; *the only way to Archie* is through taking up the cross of your duty, and bearing it to the end; you will have little help, you will faint often by the way—with no warm shelter of a man's love to creep into, *but* you will have given back to Archie a little of all that his courage and devotion have given to his country."

Lucilla moved as if in pain, but some of the strained, terrible look had gone out of her eyes.

"Don't you think Archie will know *now* if you break

down, and refuse to be what *he* was—a good citizen of the state?"

"Jim has taken care of me ever since I was little; he will not *let* me die," said Lucilla. "I should lose the way to Archie with Beau—I should stumble and fall." She shivered as at a tangible coldness. . . . Nature struck, and refused to comfort him, or let him comfort *her;* the despair was too absolute, not to be argued about; what suffering must have gone before, to teach so final a lesson!

"When God has done with you, He will call you," said Cinders inflexibly. "How dare you rush unsummoned into His presence? But how sweet at last to go, knowing that Archie will claim you as his brave little mother, and be proud of you!"

Lucilla weakened.

"He always called me that," she said. Gradually the frozen inner forces of her nature were responding to the warm human call made upon them; there are women in whom the ineradicable right must prevail even if it drive the spikes of martyrdom into their hearts, who will turn from the warm gulf-stream of love to the chill of the lawful iceberg, and Lucilla was one of these women.

"Beau is all alone," she said, and her lips quivered; "poor Beau."

"Then come to him," cried Cinders, leaping up, and seizing her hand, hurried her towards the door, praying hard that they might not meet Lexborough on the stairs, in the hall, or before they got out into the street

CHAPTER XXV

"Il y a toujours une autre."

AMID his books, in the dim and splendid room, Beauclerk had risen, pallid, to receive Lexborough.

None had dared to disturb him. He did not even know that Lucilla had left the house.

"You have come to tell me that my wife is dead?" he said, and his hand shook. He had always felt that Archie's death meant hers, and his first thought, his first fear, had been for her; half-a-dozen times he had started to go to her, as often turned back. One must be very sure of one's welcome, of one's power to help in such moments as these.

"She is with me," said Lexborough, eyes and tone so significant that Beauclerk pulled himself together, and looked at him closely. "I was just in time," and he threw down on the table between them a twisted scrap of paper.

Beauclerk's face was calm as he took up the paper, and unfolded it.

"I ask the forgiveness of Cinders, and Jim, and Andrew, for what I am about to do. I could not live without Archie."

"Where is your name?" said Lexborough. "I was

not a moment too soon—the pistol was in her hand —at her temple."

"Lucilla always fainted at firearms," said Beauclerk incredulously.

"She has been learning the use of them for weeks past," said Lexborough. "The long strain told, and she has not been in her right mind for some time. That is why I have shadowed her, and made others do so abroad; so pure a woman need fear no espionage. And you could have staved it off, but you let madness or something very like it, creep, inch by inch, nearer to her through all these weary months and days; she went through her ordeal of agony and suspense alone."

Beauclerk's dry lips moved, but he did not speak. Had he not gone through *his* ordeal also? Did the man think he was suffering nothing now? It struck him as rather brutal that Lexborough, in his one-idead fashion, saw only his attitude towards Lucilla; but that a selfish man can suffer as much at the loss of his son as an unselfish one, simply had not occurred to him.

"Why was she going to kill herself?" cried Lexborough. "If you had been good to her, her heart might have broken; but suicide could not have been in her thoughts. Nothing speaks more plainly of the piled up cruelties of a man to a woman than that, at the moment of severest trial, she will go out into the street, or to her death, rather than turn to him for comfort; brave as she is, she falters at further cruelty. If she could have wept—but she has gone so far that

she can't suffer—can't cry humanly; her heart is a stone that *you* have fossilised; and it brutalises a woman. She was an old-fashioned woman, born out of her class, out of her time, and she couldn't live without love. And gradually the warp showed; *she*, the purest, sweetest soul, deliberately traversed all her best instincts. You will say she ought not to have hardened so with a child of her own; but a child's love will not fill a woman's heart who has a great capacity for loving, and he was always away—at Eton, at Sandhurst, and in Africa before he was twenty. The world calls her silly, flighty, extravagant—it sees her as she is—I knew her as she *was*——

> 'Give her back her youth again,
> Let her be as she was then!
> Give her back her proud, sweet eyes
> And her petulant, quick replies,
> Let her wave her dazzling hand,
> With its gesture of command.'—

We both loved her, you and I—with me it was the growth of years, with you a short madness—she chose you, and you married her. And I say that the debt of honour a man contracts to a helpless woman, and who refuses to pay that debt in love, in attention, in all the things that go to make her happiness, I say that man is a sweep, and morally worse than the one who cheats at cards, robs the helpless, or commits murder. You gave her *shavings*."

How the man talked, raved even, this man of few words, breaking the silence of twenty years; he could

talk for ever—of her—as a dumb man will try to speak of the woman he loves.

Beauclerk made a gesture of intolerable restlessness, even disgust. How trivial all this seemed beside the fact that Archie, his boy, was dead, and his heart was broken.

"I was never fit to tie her shoe-string," he said; "if you mean that. I never dreamed of putting myself on the same level with Lucilla. But your tirade wearies me; I will go to her. I thought (oh, pitiful belief in a woman's forgiveness!) she might have come to me; I would have tried to comfort her." In his way he was a just man, and he knew that Jim had proved his case up to the hilt. It had been fairly stated; he had failed in a debt of honour to a woman, and he knew it.

"And so I took her away," said Lexborough suddenly and loudly, "and I am going to keep her. You understand that you can make her come back, *but she comes back to her death.* She may try to live, but it will be useless; she will die either actively or passively. But if you will divorce her—and Archie is not here to mind —I will try to make her happy. I demand of you as her right to divorce her. She left your house with me openly an hour ago. She is now at mine."

Beauclerk started.

"She has left me for you?" he cried incredulously.

Men if sure about themselves, are rarely sure about women, but he knew that she did not love, never would love, Jim. The man he had secretly been jealous of was Andrew. And suddenly he realised that what had

seemed so brutal, was deadly bitter earnest, and he saw that Jim was mad—more mad than poor Lucilla. Jim always had one splendid trait, that he could never see the other side of anything; he beheld only his point, pushed on to his goal; and now the force within had got beyond him, and carried the man with it, mad, deaf, and blind to consequences.

For a moment Beauclerk looked steadily at him; it was like the flame of a spirit opposed to the brute force of a blacksmith; then he gently raised his hand.

"Not so loud," he said, for even at that moment his fastidious taste asserted itself, and he loathed melodrama. He was not blind—men never are about one another—he had known always that Jim loved her; had he been mistaken in thinking that she did not love Jim? There is this to be said for a man, that he can understand, even sorrow over a wife's love for another man, without accusing her of wrongdoing; a woman accuses him of the *one* thing, and in her bitterness finds no excuse for him.

"I will go and bring her back," he said, and looked round as if for his hat.

"You think she will come back *here*, to the doubled grief, and to the *diavolos* that is in you—cold, cruel, always striking her when least expected? For she loves you," he added grimly; "some women are so, that is why I can't trust her with you; it's only the men whom women love, who can torture them."

Beauclerk coloured. To do him justice, he was a gentleman, and the fastidiousness (and there is more

in this than a wife thinks) that will not suffer a man to go where he is not sure of a welcome, and which the coarser woman brushes aside, had much to do with his attitude towards Lucilla, for where others smeared him with flatteries, she was much too proud to beg.

Was it possible that what Jim had said was true? She had hidden it very carefully. That was the worst of those proud women, or was it the best?

"You understand," said Jim doggedly, his face like a bulldog's, "that I have given you your choice. If you won't behave decently—and I believe you *can't* make her happy—I refuse to bring her back here to her certain death."

"I do not acquiesce in my wife's dishonour," said Beauclerk quietly. "And I suppose I ought to knock you down, for in your way, I think you are a greater blackguard than I am. You are taking advantage of Lucilla's not being in her right mind to make her do a thing that she will instantly repudiate when sane. What a pair of lovers," he added with bitter irony; "upon my word she deserved a better fate: one breaks her heart, the other seeks to dishonour her! And her feet are too tender to walk in the miry ways of life. If you can convince me that it is for her good, for her happiness; but you cannot, you dare not."

"And I tell you that if she comes back, she will kill herself," said Jim doggedly; and for a while Beauclerk was silent: these two men who had fought for her love so many years ago were fighting now for her soul. . . .

"I know my wife better than you do," said Beauclerk. "She is too good, too brave, not to rise up from this blow. A bad man does not corrupt a woman like Lucilla. If it had occurred to her that she could be any help to me, she would not have gone."

"She is Archie's mother, as well as my wife," he went on. "And I think she has forgotten her duty to Archie, if she owes none to me. Man," he cried, "you are mad, and you do not know it; of all the devil's schemes a man ever conceived to help the woman he loved, yours is the wickedest. But you have reckoned without Lucilla. She is at present incapable of realising what she is doing—poor little soul, poor little thing"—he muttered to himself; "the moment she comes to herself, she will leave you."

"And that will be too late."

Beauclerk started as if he had been struck, and made a step towards him.

"You scoundrel!" he said very low, "I would kill you where you stand, if that would help her. I thought you loved her—that we two are agreed in that, to do the best we can for her?"

"And the worst would be to give her back to you,' said Lexborough. "Promise to study her, to *love* her, to companion her, and I will bring her back."

Beauclerk took several turns round the long, mellow room, the room of a scholar and a thinker, then said:

"After all, this matter is not for my decision, or for yours. It rests with Lucilla. I will not attempt to

force her back. For she will come of her own free will; your obsession has blinded you to her real character. But I demand of you, as from man to man—and you owe me something for the wrong you would have done me, and *her*—that you do not put any sort of compulsion upon my wife; that she decides the issue of the event in her own mind, guided by those dictates of right and wrong that have never yet failed her. Traitor, it's for *yourself* you fight, not her! Because you love her; because she'll make you happy! Women may do these unselfish things, but men don't; would you do it if she were not what she is?"

Lexborough paled. Was the growing light of truth dissipating that mirage born on the moor?

"I do not expect her to make me happy," he said, "but I would try to make *her* happy."

"And you couldn't."

The words were spoken indifferently as from an intensely preoccupied mind, disturbed in its great grief by paltry side issues, but the finality of them fell on Jim's heart like lead.

"I will not promise," he said between his teeth. "I will not hold her by force, but I will use every argument in earth and heaven to keep her from you. And what is more, I warn you that if she drifts, of her own free will, into my arms, they will be a trap to hold her that she will never get out of this side of the grave. With me she shall have comradeship, trust, the word in season, sympathy; the certainty that one person will

always think her right, however wrong. And I swear before God, that I never had one thought but to shield her and make her happier, until I came to know what she intended, and saw that this was the only way to save her. If you would have promised what I asked you——"

"That is between my wife and myself," said Beauclerk coldly. "I do not recognise you in the matter. I have told you the conditions; now leave me."

Lexborough paused on his way out, a sudden conviction of this man's power over Lucilla unmanning him.

Was the fearful power of the unwisely loved to prevail all along the line in men as in women?

That slight, fair, frail man holding out his hand to Lucilla might beckon, and bring her back to his side yet. For a man can always reckon on the goodness of a really good woman—the exchequer is never empty; it is on the bad ones that he never draws, knowing that the smallest draft will be dishonoured.

"Have you ever had a child of your own?" said Beauclerk, agonising to be alone.

"No, thank God."

"Then, curse you, thank the devil, not God, for your hard heart; and leave me to my sorrow."

As the door closed, Beauclerk sank down, seeming to shrivel up in his chair. No human soul can taste the full bitterness of two tragedies at the same moment, and in the groan of "Archie!" that burst from his lips, Lucilla already was forgotten.

CHAPTER XXVI

"The one false word is Ichabod,
The glory is not departed,
They lie who say it, being heavy-hearted.
The glory was here; the glory is hid with God,
All glory that we lose, or we forego,
Some day shall find us, this I surely know.

All lost and lovely things of long ago,
Whose living fire grew cold,
Upon the altars that we built of old
Shall come and warm again
The grey and empty places of our pain,
Visible gods and fair
Breathing immortal promise in the air,
That, being past sunset, lets all colours go."

LEXBOROUGH'S hand was on the door handle of his own room when it turned suddenly from the inside, and he found himself face to face with Cinders leading Lucilla, and in a moment Mrs. Beauclerk had drifted like a bit of gossamer against the black of that towering figure, and his wastefully extravagant hand closed about her as on a much-loved child.

"I am taking her home to her husband," said Cinders.

His eyes flashed, and his foot, firmly planted, told that there was to be a tug-of-war between them. It had never entered into Jim's calculations that any one but Beau should try to wrest Lucilla from him, and he

scowled across at Sarah, as at one who had deserted her post. But the woman never heeded him; she was standing up, watching the struggle keenly.

"She shall not go back," said Lexborough, and his jaws gritted. "Is it a greater shame for her to be my honoured wife, than to be a woman who has killed herself for grief because her son has done his duty?"

"She shall do neither," cried Cinders. "Oh, coward, *coward* yourself, to take advantage of her state, for which on awakening she would truly kill herself, not from sorrow, but from shame!"

Lucilla stirred in that jealous clasp; it seemed ages since she had been thus supported; she had stood alone so long that it was only by its comfort she knew how much she had missed it, and a man can always comfort a woman in sorrow as a woman cannot.

"Would you steal from a trusting child?" cried Cinders fiercely; "can't you see that she is mad even to have thought of such a thing?"

"Not mad," he said, "but lack of love has calloused, hardened her. What saving grace or tenderness could be hers under such conditions of life? But I will bring all those tendernesses, those graces back. She shall weep away every one of those horrible years on my heart, and together we will build up an entirely new existence."

He stroked her hair; she looked unsubstantial as a dream, white as an unmelted snowflake, as she leaned her head against his breast with closed eyes, mental and physical exhaustion in every line of her body.

"But you could not make her happy," said Cinders cruelly. "Can't you see, don't you know, that it's not you she loves, but Beau?"

"That may be," he said doggedly, "but as brother, friend, lover—what she will—I mean to take her in my arms and comfort her. The carriage is waiting at the door to take her to my country house. Lucilla, you will come? You—" he held her away from him, and stroked her hair lingeringly, "you left of your own free will, and the servants know——"

"I have been with her ever since you left, her maid has been with her all through—you talk of servants! Servants!" repeated Cinders, with bitter contempt. "Isn't it part of the absurdity, the shame and contradictions of our lives, that while the servants dread our giving them bad characters, we are outwardly ordering our lives that they may give *us* fairly decent ones? There is no reason on earth why she should not return to her own house."

"If she goes back," he said, "she will kill herself. I have just come from Beauclerk—and I told him so."

"And he says—" exclaimed Cinders.

"He leaves it in Lucilla's hands," said Jim reluctantly.

"Knowing that his honour is safe in them," cried Cinders joyfully, and Lucilla started, as when some centrifugal force is touched in slumber, and we suddenly waken. Beauclerk knew her best, that if in a moment of weakness she all but let go of the right, she closed but the more fiercely on it afterwards . . . yet as Lucilla

slipped away from Jim's suddenly slackened arms, and stood unsupported, the mere physical need of human warmth and sympathy fought in her against the icy terror of her lot . . . to return to the man who had failed her all her life, who would fail her to the end, made her shiver in spite of herself. She had always that feeling with Beauclerk that she had strayed away from the hearth-fire into a refrigerator . . . with Archie all was warm . . . and with Jim . . . and she looked up piteously into her cousin's face.

He had told Beauclerk that if she came to him he would not loose her of his own free will, but he would not keep her against it, and now she must decide—was at that very moment deciding. With some women, purity is in their very blood, and he looked upon her, but did not speak.

Nor madness nor sorrow could dim Lucilla's exquisite daintiness and beauty, and as she pushed the hair back from her brow, like a child who fears to stand alone, he clenched his hands to keep them from seizing and holding her, in spite of Cinders and the whole world.

"Archie's mother must be true to herself—true to Archie's father; his mother must be a pure woman, if a broken-hearted one, to the end," cried Cinders. Then suddenly she flushed deeply, "Oh! it is horrible that this sacred hour of a mother's grief should be sullied by such discussions, such thoughts as these!"

A torturing sigh broke from the man's breast, and

he made a slight gesture—the gesture of defeat. For the greater the man's love for the woman is, the more easy is he to manage; and it struck Cinders suddenly how much more Jim loved Lucilla than Andrew loved her—but there had been no one to fight for *her* last night, no one to show Andrew the right way.

"Would you want to do it if she were not bright, and good, and beautiful?" cried Cinders ruthlessly. "Would you take all this trouble for an old, or cross, or painted woman? It is to please yourself; it is because you are deceiving yourself; and to *her* will be the loss and the awakening, to *you* the dishonourable gain. To seize the treasure of one whose wits are not there to guard it, and you a soldier — and what that means only a soldier knows—and yet you would wrong Beauclerk, Lucilla, *Archie;* because you are possessed of a false idea, because in trying to save her from committing one crime, you are making her commit an infinitely greater. You are a man—your sin will do you no harm; but has it ever struck you that in the long run she may commit suicide to be rid of *you?*"

Sarah, looking grimly on, and marking time, took long odds on Cinders, and in that moment the obsession begun on the moor that night, left Jim for ever. He had created a monster—a second self, that had grown stronger than its creator; that had seemed to grow strong with all that was best in him, to aim at the highest good for what it loved—and now he

beheld it, tricked out in traitor's airs, luring what he loved to perdition—false to her, false to his better self—impelling him to the act, not of a hero, but of the blackguard that Beauclerk had just now called him.

Cinders was no meddler; something in her wan face and sad eyes answered to the agony in his. She seemed to be trembling under some secret blow that had shaken her to the depths of her being, giving her clearer vision than had ever been his, for he saw now that he had been as mad as Lucilla . . . the girl had saved him from the greatest wrong he could ever have done to his dear lady.

Cinders seized that moment of remorse, and snatching Lucilla's hand, opened the door, and drew her swiftly across the threshold, but on the other side of it Lucilla stopped, and ran back, and Cinders did not hinder her, for now her madness, too, was over.

"Jim, dear Jim," she said, for his had once been the true love, and if now it had become the false, for over twenty years it had lived on, mocked and derided, and a chill terror of a future always without him, as without Archie, seized her; but he turned his face aside, his hand waved her away, and Lucilla went slowly, moaning, and looking back.

Mrs. Beauclerk had not left her house two hours when she returned to it with Cinders and her maid, and went straight, and with perfect composure, to her husband.

At the sound of the opening door Beauclerk did not

stir; he was sitting at a table with his head bowed down on his arms; before him was Archie's last portrait. Her mind was clearing, but the sobbing ache of her heart growing nearer; strange that the tears that would not come before, were in her eyes when Beau lifted his set face, and saw, and stood up before her, and "the days that had been" crowded upon her.

As in a glass, they saw in each other's dilating eyes, the horror, the despair, the emptiness of their lives . . . their flesh crept, and a mortal agony shook them like reeds. He silently opened his arms to her, and with a great gasping, mingled cry of "*Archie, Archie!*" they clung to one another. Tears came to her then—tears of healing, in the broken words that escaped them, all that the one had forgotten, the other remembered of Archie—all their pride in him, their love . . . and in that moment the awful loneliness of Lucilla's heart was stilled.

"Beau," she said presently, "I was willing to stay with Jim. It was Cinders who brought me away. She said, *that was not the way to Archie*, and so I came back."

But his arms did not relax their hold of her. It spoke well for the man that he had trusted her; that he had received her without asking a single question; in his way he had behaved finely and well.

"Hugh," she said, and he started; it was years since she had thus addressed him; and his taste and his pride had been alike outraged by her abbreviation of

his surname. Now, in an irresistible impulse of restored confidence he unloosed her, and unlocked a drawer. It struck acutely on her then that selfishness, and doing what he pleased, had not made his life any happier than his failure to her had made hers, but the sight of the colourless phial in his hand completely restored to Lucilla her reason.

"I have often thought about it," he said, "what I should do if Archie went, and you followed him. Not unless."

"But you did not do it," she said; "you had more courage than I. And I should have done it if Jim had not taken me away. We were both mad—he and I."

He lifted her hand to his lips. She was once more sincere, the old Lucilla he had loved. Who shall say that by tortuous ways of weariness the wanderer did not come back to the one pure love of his life? And if a man do not see the whole length of the climb as a woman's lightning glance does, he may be taking his first slow step upward while she supposes him standing still, and Beauclerk was taking his then. Gusty and chilly might blow the hearth-fire by which he and Lucilla henceforth sat, but where it burned would be home. And though he had his own ideas about woman's place in creation, yet having patiently tried doing as he liked, he could not say that it had made him any happier than if he had conformed to those unwritten laws of honour, that it is more pain than pleasure in the long run to break.

He sighed.

"Rien ne va plus." What an epitaph! But he knew that it was his. That was the tragedy, the disgraceful unfairness of it; that with all the wish in the world he had nothing to give her. He had wasted his life elsewhere. And as if he had subtly communicated it, the same thought came to Lucilla, as she glanced aside from her anguish, and round the beautiful room with a little shiver. Then their agony submerged them, and they clung drowning to each other . . . perhaps in those slow tears, hard-won from Beauclerk, were washed away half the mistakes of his life.

Suddenly in the house there arose a confusion, news electric was in the air, and made itself felt through the solid walls before voice and feet could carry it; the door flew open, and the butler, white with excitement, stammering with joy, burst into the room.

"It's all a mistake, ma'am," he said. "Mr. Archie's not dead, only wounded; some one has just come from the War Office to tell you so."

. . . . . .

May not joy kill even as sorrow? And now that Archie was numbered with the living, was Lucilla to be numbered with the dead?

When she came at last out of that death-like fainting-fit, Andrew Mackenzie had been added to the number of those who watched her, but she did not even see him, only held out her arms to Cinders, who had saved her. But for Cinders, she had now been

Archie's dishonoured mother; but for Jim, she had been dead. Yet Andrew, looking with eyes of hate at the girl, *dévergondé*, disordered, haggard, that embrace seemed a profanation, and he longed to pluck Lucilla out of it, but to Cinders, with shining eyes, Andrew and her own trumpery affairs simply did not exist. For she had looked that day on tragedy, and all things imagined, not real, were simply as dust.

False appearances, false love, disloyalty — nothing mattered beside that triumphant joy of, "This my son was dead, and is alive again, was lost and is found," and she had no look or even thought for Andrew in departing. Beauclerk's "God bless you, Cinders!" sent her away happy.

CHAPTER XXVII

"Sirrah, I am come to woo,
Marriage I must have of you."

WHEN Cinders shut the door behind her on Robert Ingestre, she had definitely closed the longest and pleasantest love chapter of her maiden life, and hard as it was to realise, he knew that this was the end.

He was aware, of course, that she did not love him, and, until recently, he had thought that she loved Andrew. Still, they had many tastes in common; they both hated town and loved country, and as he had often told her—

"'A ragamuffin husband, and a rantipoling wife,
We'll fiddle it, and scrape it, through the ups and downs of life,'

for you know, Cinders, you *can* rantipole with the best."

And standing there in a sombre study, at a loose end, with no shooting for a couple of months, disgusted at not getting out to the front, just in the mood that Satan loves for undoing a man, across that moment of smart, of restlessness and irritation, Celia drifted—Celia looking more helpless, more lovely, more indescribably feminine and fetching than ever.

No one would have thought, to look at her, that she

was nerving herself to the greatest effort of her life, that her intentions towards Bobbie were strictly dishonourable, for she wanted the man's whole exchequer, his estate—himself. If unfortunate with Andrew, Celia's experience of the other sex was great, and she knew that the mere fact of a man most particularly wanting one woman for a wife, often made him take another who most particularly wanted *him*, because he was in the mood of matrimony, and men mostly follow their moods.

She brought into the atmosphere a delicious fragrance, and sank down near him in a cloud of soft whiteness; and like many robust, outdoor men, he was strongly susceptible to a woman's frills and daintinesses. It had been for her feminine side he had loved Cinders, in spite of, and not *for*, her intellectual one. Celia's stupidity was no drawback to her with him, perhaps the knowledge of his own mental superiority secretly helped her, and inclined him towards her. He hated a fighting woman; he thought too much character hardened and spoiled her. His real taste was towards a soft-hearted, clinging soul, who would greet him tenderly when he came home tired from sport, and never want to move a yard out of her sheltered, guarded life. Now Cinders was always breaking out in fresh places, but the mischief was, that he had fallen in love with her before he found this out, and Cinders was a dye that fixed men's love permanently. Perhaps it was the fine nature of the girl,

perhaps it was her heart of gold; but he knew that he should go on loving her more or less to his last breath.

He roused himself now, and spoke of something—anything; but Celia was not attending, and presently he saw that large, pearly tears were brimming over her blue eyes and threatening to roll down her lovely cheeks.

"What is the matter?" he said, and took out his handkerchief to wipe them away, but they seemed reluctant to leave those blue pools of colour, and remained where they were, melting his heart to pity.

"It's—it's Andrew," she said; "he doesn't want me, and he hasn't the pluck to tell me so" (she might have added that she would not have allowed him to do so until she was sure of Bobbie), "and I know that it is Cinders he wants to marry, not me."

"But they don't speak!" protested Bobbie. "Lately they have looked as if they positively *hated* each other."

"Yes, but that's pretence. Hate is just love turned inside out, you know, and they've both got—got *such* tempers!"

Bobbie considered. If Cinders wouldn't let him make her happy, why stand in her way with Andrew?

"But don't you love him?" said Bobbie.

Celia sat erect, those blue pools had swallowed most of her tears now.

"I'm *sick* of intellect," she said; "there are times

when one longs for a sound, healthy animal to gambol with, and I ask you, how *can* you gambol with a one-armed man?"

"That's unkind," said Bobbie, shaking his head, but Celia had held up her face so appealingly, so like a grieving child, that he had much ado not to kiss her, for she had delightful little *calineries*, as Andrew knew to his cost, and this shocked Bobbie's constancy so much, that he drew just as far away as he had insensibly drawn near to her.

"What's to be done?" he said, and felt himself a villain. Celia, at that moment, was just as sweet as sugar; he liked a woman who was sugar all through. And now that definite red-brown note of Cinders was removed (and the girl had always killed Celia's delicate tints, as an oil painting will an exquisite Japanese water-colour), the reproach of insipidity was removed. The coral-pink of Celia's lips was lovely away from Cinders' pure carmine, and yet—and yet, there came a look of misery into his eyes that frightened Celia for her chances, and knowing her man, she played her trump card, putting her hands up before her face, and sobbing as if her heart would break. Bobbie was in that savage mood when a strong man, tired of life, puts his horse at a brick wall, when a weak one goes on a mad, joyless spree, it would have been far less trouble in the long run to break his neck; and involuntarily Celia shut her eyes to his grim looks, and prayed for courage to go on.

"Oh!" she cried, trembling for her hopes, "can't you see that Cinders *won't* take Andrew unless I jilt him? But even if he jilts *me*, she would think nothing of throwing away her life's happiness for some quixotic notion."

"Yes," thought Bobbie, "that was always Cinders' character. As a child she would say 'no' to what she most wanted, perhaps because she thought others wanted it so much."

He started up, and took a turn or two up and down the room. Meanwhile Celia sobbed into his big pocket-handkerchief, and the sound hurt him.

For Bobbie had a large slice of his mother in him, which meant, that he knew tears did not always mean temper, but a thousand things untranslatable of words, and he could stand them; the real, unadulterated man-savage hates murderously the woman who puts him to the misery of even seeing her weep, much less having to stop her. So Bobbie sat down by Celia, and began very gently to dry her eyes.

"You know, Bobbie," she said helplessly, "dear Bobbie, it isn't altogether Andrew—and I couldn't help it, but I've always loved *you!*"

Alas! he had always known it, and naturally he had liked her for it—what man would not?

"My dear girl," he said, and coloured up, and put his hand on hers, just to make it not quite so hard for her.

Now many a man flounders, and is lost, at the first unexpected proposal made to him, but if he manages

to win through, he may in time come to be as clever in rejecting succeeding ones as the most thorough-paced woman-flirt alive, but such men are not the chivalrous and tender-hearted of their sex.

"But I do," she said, "I *do!* I loved you from the first minute I ever set eyes on you, and I don't a bit mind your saying *no*," she went on recklessly; "I've often had to say it myself! Why shouldn't a man see both sides of the shield?"

"You would be wretched in the country," he said, "there's no sort of fun for a woman who doesn't hunt."

But in itself this was not important, Bobbie didn't really mind that; women are nuisances in the hunting-field unless, like Cinders, they rode better than most men; and if they could not, he preferred a woman who could not ride at all.

"But, indeed," cried Celia eagerly, and he could almost taste the salt tears on her lovely little face, "I don't think I should make you as unhappy as Cinders would. She would always be *doing* things, you know, and you like to do them for yourself!"

Bobbie shook his head, but it was so true, and Celia in the attitude of suitor was delightful, even humorous, and once he could get the rich brown hair and eyes of Cinders out of his head, why should not Celia make as good a wife as any other? A healthy outdoor man does not see enough of a woman's indoor whims to let them worry him, and Bobbie knew that he *had* to marry some day, an entailed estate leaves no choice,

and property is responsible for many a long-legged boy walking about the world, enjoying himself for all he is worth.

And he had always hated an officious woman, loved helplessness, and to be silly is not to be unkind; he knew well enough that Celia sincerely loved him—and there was no vice about her. Give her plenty of cushions, and make her thoroughly comfortable, and he would be pretty sure of finding her where he left her, but what would Dinah say—Dinah, who hated town ladies and all their ways? But if it would make Cinders happy. . . . Suddenly he became grave.

"Look here, Celia," he said, "your ways are not my ways, and I couldn't have a lot of scandal talked in my house. You would have to be kind to my old women, and villagers, and all sorts of people that you know nothing about; in the country, you know, there are good women and bad women; rural opinion does not recognise the class between, that talks crooked but sometimes acts straight, to which you and Mrs. Beauclerk belong."

"But, Bobbie," cried Celia, "see how you have *improved* me! Do I ever talk as I used to?—and I never *did* anything wrong! Cinders says much worse things than I do!"

"I couldn't live in town, you know," he said decidedly, "you could come up for the season, and I would look you up now and then"—and Celia knew that the game was won.

"This house is my own," she cried, with sparkling eyes. "And with yours in the country, we'll pay each other visits all the year round. And it really is—is—Yes, dear?" And then he took her in his arms, and kissed her.

She thought of Andrew's one unsatisfactory arm, and gave a little sigh of bliss, but into *his* eyes there came that look with which she would have to be familiar always, more or less, though he would be good to her, after the manner of his kind. Many a woman sees it through fifty years perchance of wedded life, yet endures it, for the man has been her very own, while the other woman has only been his sweetheart.

And then he kissed her japonica lips again, thinking of Cinders' red mouth, and so ended the successful wooing of Robert Ingestre by Celia Schilizzi.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"I never saw a purple cow,
I never wish to see one;
But I am very, very sure
I'd rather see than be one."

"I DECLARE those cows *are* purple!" cried Lucilla; "or is it that the colour has got into the shadow?"

She was leaning forward, and looking earnestly at some small objects moving on the opposite steep side of the Bowl, not unlike women's sunshades roaming hither and thither, as if light hearts were beneath them.

"How I envy those cows—cows who know the best of everything, and get it! Think of those good hours, those merry hours, enjoying it all at first hand, while you and I will have to come back presently to four walls, and imitations of the real thing!"

The time was the end of July, and she was sitting beside Andrew in the pine-wood above the Punch Bowl; it was the day before Archie's ship was expected in, and her fancies flew over the other side of the downs visible from the Cross. On her way hither, she had caught Andrew, and imprisoned him among the purple for a few hours.

Fold upon fold lay upon the moor and mountain-

sides a royal garment of purple heather, turning in places (where the sun smote it) to rich wine colour, but Andrew, seeing it all, took no note of it. His one arm was tightly clasped about his knees; he seemed to be listening, indeed, but not to Lucilla. He was thinking of how he had bidden Cinders shut her eyes, and dream of the Punch Bowl, of how she had looked—good God! if, as a man engaged to another woman, he had coveted her then, what must it not have been for Arundel, thrown so much with her? For there is beauty, there is temptation of intellect as of body, that the strongest man may not be ashamed to succumb to—as Andrew had succumbed to Cinders.

"Have you and Cinders quarrelled?" said Lucilla, being nearer to him in thought than he supposed. "For you love her, Andrew."

"I *did* love her," he said.

"There is no past tense in true love," she said, and he looked at her in keen interrogation. How much did she, or did not she know of what had happened to Cinders?

A look of sorrow clouded Lucilla's but now radiant face; she was happy, and she wanted every one else to be happy. She knew that something was very wrong with the girl, all the irresponsibility that made her greatest charm was gone, but Cinders had refused to tell her anything before that abrupt departure from town.

"Don't ask me where I am going with Dinah," Cinders had said, "for I won't tell you. But you'll have Archie

soon, and some day I'll come back. And I shall love you always—always."

And Lucilla, wise in the lore of friendship, had asked no questions; but if Cinders would not tell, and Andrew would not speak, what could she do to help them?

"I often think," she said, in her old whimsical way, "that we are too apt to think the persons *on the stage* are the only important ones; we forget the scene-shifter, who may malignantly crush them! Or like the glittering Royalties at a State banquet; but the cooks out of sight may poison their food! Now there's something, or somebody, out of sight, who is keeping apart you and Cinders. For poor Bobbie being disposed of—" she sighed, and made a sign of the hangman's noose.

"Where is Arundel?" said Andrew significantly; "find him, and you find Cinders."

For a moment she winced, struck full in the face by the sheer brutality of the thing, then he said, looking across to where he and Cinders had sat on that April morning, and speaking with extraordinary bitterness—

"Are not the Arundels of this world wise who ask no leave, but *take?* Is the thought of those joys that we have foregone as sweet, after all, as the tasting of them would have been? Not always. The spirit may applaud, but the flesh rebels. If we had two lives—one to be good in, one to rejoice in—we should be able to say which left the most abiding sense of satisfaction; as it is, who can? And society, as it is constituted to-day,

encourages such men as Arundel; they are not brought to book for these things, and the women *don't tell.*"

Lucilla was very white now, with burning eyes of indignation.

"I don't know what you mean," she said proudly. "Explain yourself."

"If Cinders won't, I can't," he said sternly. "I used to think there was full confidence between you." But to him it looked as if Cinders had feared to tell.

"We know each other's hearts, if you mean that," said Lucilla, "but we don't prate everything out like charwomen. I would answer for Cinders' soul as my own—or more. Indeed, I should not have one to save now but for her: listen. Andrew, I've never had a chance to tell you, but I went away with Jim. But for *her* I should be with him now, and Archie would come back to find a shameful mother."

He started.

"You were mad, then, Lucilla; but she has had nothing to turn her head—she was sane always. Tell me," he said.

"Jim stopped *me*, and Cinders stopped Jim. I was a coward. I learned to shoot—at a gallery, you know. And Jim was the only one who understood, and he followed me about, even *here*—though I didn't know that—and when he brought the news of Archie's death, I just held my breath, *I wouldn't think*, and went straight to my room, and there was the pistol ready loaded to my hand, and Sarah kept the door. But Jim came after me—he was just in time."

She paused a moment, and looked out at the wonderful scene below.

"I said, 'You may stop me this time, but I will do it the first opportunity I have.' He said, 'I know it; that is why I am taking you away.' He put my hat and veil on my head, my gloves on my hands, and I let him. I said, 'Where are you taking me?' He answered, 'To my home. If you commit suicide, you will never win to Archie in the next world; there is no place there for cowards.' 'Do they let bad women in?' I said. 'Archie hates bad women.' 'They let in everybody but cowards,' he said; 'it's a breach of discipline to go there till you are called. I won't let you do it.' Then he took me away; and Sarah came too."

Andrew drew a deep breath. He was thinking how little, how very little, one may know of one's dearest friend. Yet he felt that the situation was not more impossible (to hear of) than the vulgar one in which he and Cinders and Arundel had been plunged.

"And then?" he said.

"He took me to his rooms in Jermyn Street, and went to tell Beau where I was, before taking me to his country house. But Cinders had somehow found out, and she came into the room, and pleaded with me not to go—said my duty was to Beau, to look after *him*—and I thought it cruel then . . . not now . . . it was like going back to be walled up alive in ice . . . and then Lexborough came back, and at first he would not let me go."

Andrew frowned. "And I thought Jim such a good chap," he said. "Poor Beau!"

"But Cinders fought for me, over me, and she won at last. We left him there—Jim . . . Poor Jim! his arms were warm, and I was so cold . . . but Cinders took me home. Beau asked no questions; he just took me back. I was glad then that Jim had stopped me. For all the hate that had poisoned my blood for so many years, and made me what I was, went out of me then—thank God for that! that when the great news came soon after, I was fit to receive it."

"And I thought you so brave, Lucilla."

"Yes; but I was trying to slip out sideways all the time. It was Hugh who stood up to his awful grief; had the means handy, and didn't use it. Jane Pomeroy hit the blot in me long ago—that at heart I was a coward."

"Are you?" he said incredulously. "Perfect as your pose always was for disguising your real self, you certainly hid *that* admirably."

"But she was right. Did you never meet my cousin Jane? There was a tragedy in her town house, and she lives in the country now, and is by way of being religious, making the best possible, you know, of two worlds. She is devoted to another of my cousins—Becky Moray. The men say that there is the same difference between Becky and other women as between the electric light and gas! She broke up poor Kelmersdale altogether; but it wasn't her fault. She

is a one-man woman, like me. That reminds me: Lexborough has gone out to shoot big game, and the Morays are to join him when — when Becky is able to go too."

"But about Jane," he said. One always had to pull Lucilla up from maddening digressions, she never could rescue herself.

"Well, you know, folly is very much a question of comparison, like money and other things. And I am wise to Celia, and a fool to Jane, who is very shrewd, and whose strong point is humour. A woman with a dozen children, or none, may have humour, but not a mother with only one; he makes you vulnerable, a mere bundle of trembling nerves. Now Jane never was a mother, and she never loved a man (the one she married was a connoisseur, and she was the biggest freak in all his collection), and so long as you don't love anybody, you are the right side of the hedge. I should say that to have a strong sense of humour, to be quite healthy, to be easy in pocket, and love nobody enough to give you indigestion, must be about as near heaven here below as you are ever likely to get!"

"But she found you out a coward," prompted Andrew.

"Yes; I never took her in for a moment. When Archie was ordered to South Africa, not a month after he had joined, I lost my head, and for a time was a perfect fool. She fairly hypnotised me, *suggested* the right thing to do; and it's easy to do anything if your

pride is concerned, and you make up your mind to it; and Archie was *delighted*, for I never from first to last shed one tear before him. When he went away he said to me, 'You'll keep it up, mother—'" she stopped suddenly, and with a convulsive sob, the tears rained down her cheeks. "O Andrew," she said, "you don't know . . . I used to go up there and talk to him at night. Sometimes I've thought Jim must have followed me and heard me, and that's why he watched me. For my courage was only a flash in the pan; when *it* came, I was the coward Jane Pomeroy knew me for, and I disgraced Archie. Jim saved me from death, Cinders from dishonour; in either case my boy would have been ashamed of me. I should not have kept it up."

"Poor old Jim!" said Andrew suddenly.

She looked up, and caught her breath.

"Andrew," she said, "I can't think of it; I can only think of Archie."

Yes; it was the same thing with him. He could only think of Cinders. With a feeling that in a man is tears, he looked across to that spot on the right of the Punch Bowl, where in the great hour of reckoning in his life Cinders had showed to him as scarcely a woman—women had only hurt him; not a spirit, for he felt her touch warm yet, but rather a comrade who had borne with him, sorrowed with him, comforted him, shedding upon his parched heart those dews of sympathy that ofttimes will hinder a man's heart from breaking. She had stood by Lucilla, too, in her bad

hour; but there had been no one to save *her* from . . . from . . .

The moor breathed of her, the pines called out her name. Just as it all was antagonistic, alien to Celia, it was friendly to her, and brought him, with a sense of her nearness, a horrible sense of emptiness and misery. That purple light below was all blurred, because the sad eye was turned inward . . . strange that Nature has no power to soothe our pain when we go to her in pairs. Is it because we are looking to each other for comfort (mostly in vain) that she will not draw nigh us, or because human voices do not always ring true because the *hearts* may be right, but their words are all wrong? But go to her alone, in deepest agony, and she will soothe and rock you on her breast to a peace that no other can.

Andrew thrust his thoughts from him, and looked at Lucilla earnestly. Not on Archie's account alone was she so beautiful once more, but because an ugly, evil guest was cast out of her heart; because she was the sincere, loving woman once more that she once had been. To be charitable and kind was Lucilla's nature; hate had entered into her life, destroying all tenderness, embittering and belittling her, making a mock of her sweetness and love, and it had perverted every good impulse in her—had made her the left-handed, enigmatic, bitter-tongued Lucilla the world knew, when she had been intended for a noble, true, and good woman.

"I have not been true to myself, Andrew," she said; "that was the pity, and Cinders knew it. The Gospel of Hate (that I and so many others practise) is neglect of manners, and little acts of kindness, to be sharp-tongued, gibing, to insist on doing what you like at the expense of other people's happiness and comfort, to give harsh judgment on poor, struggling humans. '*And ye lay hard burdens on others, and will not touch them even with the tips of your fingers*'—what does that mean but to sit in an easy chair criticising everything and everybody, yet not to abate one of our darling sins and pet indulgences? One might go on for ever with instances, all base, but Cinders made me see it as I have never seen it before. It—it always hurt me to hate Beau."

"And so she did this for you. What a nature," cried Andrew, "for Arundel to put wrong!"

"He couldn't," said Lucilla; "no one could. Surely," she cried warmly, "call it conscience, development—what you will—there comes a time in the life of every one of us worth anything, when we cease to hear people's opinions, do not pose even to ourselves, but calmly look to some invisible person within us to be pleased, or angered, or made contemptuous by our actions, and happy he whom all the world may condemn, but who is right with that inward monitor! And you mean to tell me that incorruptible critic condemns Cinders?"

"But the man is such a blackguard!" he burst out suddenly in a white fury. "I suppose it is Nature at

her old, cruel tricks of levelling up; holding the scales of selfishness and worthlessness in the one hand, and brightness and goodness in the other, balancing the fit and the unfit, the bad debt of the rascal set in her books against the hard-earned wage of the honest man, perhaps because thus alone she succeeds in carrying on her business to a successful issue; therefore has she matched Cinders and Arundel. But all things have a beginning, and can you tell me how it was possible for so noble-hearted a girl as Cinders to play with, to even support, that man's company?"

"Can you tell me," she retorted (it struck on her rather chillily how trifling to Andrew her own imminent tragedy had been in comparison with all his jealous fears of Cinders loving another man), "why we every one of us do the wrong thing every day of our lives, yet none the less get up each morning determined to do the right? There's a lot of human nature in Cinders, for all that she is such an honest, pure, sincere soul; and the people we love most have got a 'kink' in them! And probably Arundel could no more have determined the precise moment of sliding from a flirtation into thoughts of marriage with Cinders, than we can between that of waking and sleeping, though the whole world has lain in wait to trap such a moment; but *I* saw from the first that he had met his fate in her—it was *she* who would not have him."

"No?" he said, and gazed downwards with an ugly scowl that was an outrage on the beauty upon which he

looked, for he saw instead a scene that might have been transferred bodily from a sordid French play, in which Cinders was the central figure. And yet, for Lucilla and Bobbie and himself all to have so loved and trusted the girl, was to deny point blank the evil thing in her he had believed possible.

They both turned their heads as Girt Jan Ridd came along the path behind them on the way to one of his meadows. He had rolled his sleeves up over his great brown arms; the hand that swung a keg of beer was big and strong enough to fell an ox.

Lucilla looked after him very kindly. Anything big and strong appealed to her irresistibly, and he was also a thorough sportsman, and learned in all country lore.

"I like him," said Lucilla, "the great gentle giant. He took me out for a drive yesterday behind a thoroughbred. 'Do you know what I call her?' he said confidentially. '"Lady," because she has such perfect manners, so gentle and good.' Then he told me shyly of his long courtship of his wife, and difficulty in getting her; first, he had to win her over, then her father—and he said she had a nice mother who was as good as his own mother—and now his little girl was taking after *her* mother; he seemed so proud of those three generations of gracious womanhood. O Andrew, when you see love, and a real *home* like that! The Gospel of Love practised, not the Gospel of Hate! Late last night I came down the hill—I had gone to the moor to thank God for Archie—and the bright lights

through the window-blinds of the little place, so cosy and homelike, made me think of some picture I have seen, where Nell and her grandfather, cold and weary, are drawing near to a little homestead, within which were warm welcome and kind hearts—a place to be *refreshed*, body and soul. Byron's truest line of all was, 'For without hearts there is *no* home.'"

Andrew nodded. Mr. and Mrs. Girt Jan Ridd's happiness only accentuated his own wants and limitations.

"And I've found out something," went on Lucilla. "You know how angry I used to be at that cultivated patch which seemed to spoil the wildness of the Bowl? Well, from this pine-wood those little dwellings show warm and nest-like, sheltering a happy community, nestled warm in the hollow, and knit by a thousand ties of loneliness and mutual dependence? For the broom-makers have been there for centuries; they reclaimed every inch of the ground from the desolate region, and innumerable little paths cross and recross the bottom, but all lead to the one place, like—

'A heart-cherished home on some desolate plain!'

Some day I shall take Cinders there, and you too," she added as she sprang up. "Andrew, if you want to find Cinders, watch for her here. This place is as much associated with you in her memory, as *she* is with it to you. The Punch Bowl has taken you to its bosom—two human atoms—and something tells me

that by it you will meet, and all that keeps you asunder be chased away as the shadows were just now by the sun!"

They turned to look. It drew towards the evening hour, and an incredible peace brooded over the Bowl and on the little settlement below, with its emerald fields and curling smoke-wreaths, even the clouds raced no more, the sun had long ago called them off from their fun and play to bed.

"I believe Ingestre knows where she is," said Andrew, as they went along the enchanting path made surely not for friends, but lovers' meetings.

"If so, he has not told Celia," said Lucilla. "I saw her yesterday. What a beginning to their married life! How grateful you must have been when he relieved you of her!"

"Ah! what luck for Celia," said Andrew. "She wanted so badly an excuse to get rid of me! Who wants a cripple?" he added morosely, and Lucilla forgave him his shocking temper in pity for the suffering that had ruined it.

On the moor they found a gay and noisy game in progress among the lads and lasses who had come hither on a bean-feast, and who conducted their enjoyments with the robust vigour that seemed natural to the air and neighbourhood. They stood in a circle, clasping hands, and in the centre was a man who dexterously swung at the end of a stout cord a sand-bag, that skimmed the ground under their ankles, so that they had to jump to avoid it; it was, in fact, a skip-

ping match, and the one who did not skip at the right moment was "out," but till they were caught, ye gods! how high they skipped! The heat was roasting, the women were cloth-jacketed, but one by one, lads and lasses unwillingly went out, till at last there were only two left, and Lucilla turned, and went with Andrew along those glorious purple tracts that the bean-feasters did not even notice.

"It is like marriage," she said solemnly, "for the sand-bag trips us all up at last. It would have had to be an amazingly high kick by which Bobbie managed to escape Celia!"

CHAPTER XXIX

"Amorist, agonist, man, that incessantly toiling and striving,
Snatches the glory of life only from love and from war."

YESTERDAY had been one of storm and milky vapour that swirled to a Witches' Sabbath about the Bowl, lifting only to show a bracken, russet, sombre, weeping, more like a sodden rag than that glory of autumn tints which Cinders had expected, and a bitter sense of disappointment had seized her. For gone were the colour and charm for which she loved it; the two great factors of beauty in the Bowl are the sun and the clouds, failing these, it is a body without a soul—is as nothing; yet it should have satisfied her sense of fitness, so completely in harmony was it with her present life.

"Wind of the East,
Wind of the sunrise-seas,
Wind of the clinging mists and grey, harsh rains,—
Blow moist and chill across the wastes of brine,
And shut the sun out, and the moon and stars,
And lash the boughs against the dripping eaves,
Yet keep thou from my love."

But that was yesterday—this was to-day; the rain had ceased late on the preceding evening, a sharp frost had come in the night, and turned each dripping leaf and pool to dazzling crystal, the roads had dried like

magic, and through that veritable *aqua vitæ* of mountain air Cinders sped with an extraordinary sense of lightness, of exhilaration, of sheer forgetfulness of sorrow, looking over into the magic scene below.

For, angry at being separated a whole twenty-four hours from his beloved earth, the sun had got up early, and rushed at her—an impatient lover, shouting for joy—and he had brought with him the clouds, nursed by the wind, that are heaven's children; and so quick was the exchange of thought between him and a radiant, laughing world, holding the mirror up to the rain-washed, stormy blue sky, that human eyes could not follow or trap those love messages; one could only look on breathless, and think how childish was all human play in comparison with this, though the clouds were often wayward, and played games to which they were not bidden. Sudden a shadow would dart down below, draw swiftly back, hesitate, relent, then, in a wide embrace, snatch half the Bowl, leaving the rest neglected; then, and as it moved majestic, the earth tried hard to hold it fast, clung to it as long as possible, but it would suddenly escape, turning to indigo the hill in the foreground, leaping stealthily on the three-cornered wedge, emerald green as young wheat that topped the firs away to the left, leaving alone the vast, dim blueness of the distant country, where a shaft of light struck to yellow the Charterhouse School, and here and there a valley, a town, a mere, all remote and out of the picture, and

of no account to the Bowl and its glorious play. Sun-dance, shadow-play, the old, old love idyll of the earth and the sky, Cinders could have watched it for ever, but tore herself away at last to look at the bracken that, fold upon fold, lap after lap of madder-brown, ran down the mountain side, and climbed russet on the shoulder of the great cliff above the road. For, often as it had vexed Lucilla's soul by impinging on the heather, thrusting its green into that full purple flood of colour, now the rivals had joined hands in one pinky hue, and at a distance could scarcely be distinguished from each other.

The puffs of green smoke of Andrew's day showed fitful tints of amber, umber, and sienna, at a distance too indeterminate for beauty (there is only one word that holds their colours, and that is autumn), and in places where a slender tree stood isolated in a ring of firs, like a delicate lady shivering in her fretted yellow lace ball-gown, they seemed to point the finger of scorn at her, like sober, assured merchants, wrapped warm in their slate-blue winter coats, emerging from the obscurity forced on them by the impudent beauty of summer town trash.

And Nature is a little cruel; she turns her back on what is over, done with, and her only mistake as an *entrepreneur* is that she hurries on her "turns" with such rapidity that you have scarcely time to enjoy one, when another is set before you.

Thus, long before the leaves are down, she looks

round briskly, and says to the earth, "Come, this will never do—you are cold, you are chilly; now I am going to warm you," and she calls out her robins and her holly on the spot, striking with them an aggressive, vivid note of scarlet, for this is above all things a hardy fir, gorse, and heather country; it is for this reason, perhaps, that ephemeral summer seems by contrast more splendid here than elsewhere. And the holly answers, "*Here!*" glossy, saucy, its green and scarlet new-minted; and "Hurry up!" it says to the pale tree near it, "out you go!" like a fresh young bride hustling an old wife's faded and tattered skirts. "I was here ages before roads, and *tame* people, or jerry-builders spoiled the country, and I flourished ages before Christmas puddings were ever heard of, and my runagates, and wild men, and gipsies took me as a part of the landscape, did not look at me from the point of view of a costermonger's cart, and Covent Garden!"

The Bowl was full of holly; it dominated the landscape, you could hardly see the leaves for the berries; somehow they seemed to Cinders prodigal and insolent, and she rejoiced presently to come on a graceful tree that was not scarlet, but pink all over, each slender bough covered with pink fruit, and not one single leaf upon it, so that fragile and exquisite it stood in shape and colour, a thing of beauty in the midst of the grey-green gorse.

And the gorse, long ousted by the vivid green of

the bracken, crowed over by the purple of the heather, dogged, persistent, and muttering, "My turn now," was beginning to push out here and there into golden patches, for it is no come-and-go-lightly, any more than what has been bracketed with it in the time-old proverb. And Nature, who gives to every dog his day, has given to the gorse an especially long and a merry one. It will even peer from under the snow, and laugh at you.

She sighed a little impatiently, as through a gap in the furze she gazed at the whole panorama, startling, vivid, of indescribable movement, and light and beauty, thinking that a painter might sketch it from a hundred different points, yet not one would resemble the other—not one could give even a faintly accurate idea of the Bowl to a person who had not seen it. For if from the Cross you might dash in its colours (but never its shadows), the vast campagna there claimed your undivided attention, while the Punch Bowl looked a mere detail far below, yet as you descended into it, the world beyond showed only as a distant gleam, and near and clear were the frowning hills in the foreground, and the sunlight, and the colour, dear and clear as those things that we know intimately, as the things over the hills and far away, never were, and never can be.

Unwillingly at last Cinders tore herself away and, mounting her steed, went skimming down the smooth road, in that nearest approach to flying, save in mid-air, that has yet been invented. She was a gay trespasser,

fond of bridle-paths that, whichever way you went, brought you to some little nestled-in house, often of red-brick scallops with the grace of pale October roses blown across it (invisible till you were quite close), self-sufficing and happy. How long news must take to come from the outside—long enough to be glad that one had not heard it; for the important things of life are not stopped by the hysterical Ah's! and Oh's! of the idle onlookers! Also she helped herself liberally to the valleys, walking and riding alternately, and this enabled her to be out a whole day at a time without fatigue, indulging her love for solitude; for to be solitary is not to be lonely.

No instrument answers more perfectly to thought and hand than a light, swift bicycle, put together by an artist in his craft, as no horse can be the perfect servant that is this obedient compound of wood and steel. A horse, if worth anything, has moods and tempers, and will impress them on, and affect yours; he may be as easy as a chair, but you are always aware that he is under you; you are no more aware of the other than of mother earth, and, in your lightest reverie, your deepest thoughts, he never intrudes himself upon you.

So away she went, against that buoyant, intoxicating air, and the world was all before her. There was not room for dull care to ride behind her, he had no place in such a morning, and she felt, as she always did when alone with Nature, the absolute impertinence of finding

all creation wrong because as a mere unconsidered atom of it, she had messed up the one little corner which had been granted her to sow in!

She could not be angry with Andrew—she forgot Arundel; her eyes were clear as stars; her complexion vivid as a rose, as down, down she swooped past the Murderer's Stone, and, with many a backward glance towards the Bowl (Nature's own bold Robin Hood, irresponsible and gay), turned the shoulder of the hill, and at once her eye was plunged into a whole forest of reds, and greens, and yellows.

At a distance some of the trees showed puce-colour, nearer you saw it was the naked boughs and trunks that gave that effect, as only at the top were the leaves left, and this gave them a winnowed, spiritual look—like Lucilla, thought Cinders, when she had left her in her great joy sitting beside Andrew.

And the farther she descended, the farther was put back the season, for here the ferns were not withered, but in some places bronze, as though gold-beater's leaf had been applied to them, and in others were the deep dark red of a child's hair. Happiest of all were those still streaked with green, as if they clung to life because they loved it so much, and Nature in her Juggernaut had smiled upon, and purposely spared them as she passed by.

Blackberries! Belated, sweet, like those best forgotten things that others have not remembered to steal; and Cinders alighted, and plucked and ate, finding time

to chide the young beech leaves in the hedge that, like many young passionate things, struck a flagrant, even an abusive note, and seemed to spit colour at her, hurting at once her eyes and taste, though it was only because it was so near that the colour jarred. For at a distance, an old beech pushing through, and backing with its rosy flames the sable-blackness of a glorious pine (yet left the stem bare), achieved a triumph of beauty, and kept Cinders musing for long minutes over it, then she flew on, down, down as before. Surely a bird must feel like this as he flies, yet takes his bird's-eye, complete view of all he sees as he goes.

Suddenly, from a garden across the road swept the scent of a violet bed in full flood of sweetness, and arrested Cinders' flight. She went in, and the kindly woman of the house allowed her to gather to her heart's content, while Elizabeth's whimsical protest in "A German Garden" against violets, because, though they looked so modest, they dragged you to them by their scent, recurred to Cinders as she rode on, and she thought of how she would have loved to know that rare and exquisite personality which hid itself naturally from the public gaze; for how could the very genius of happy solitariness desire the admiration of crowds? In every cottage garden the dahlia stood, invariably of a deep rose-red, the very sentinel of autumn, and in her lovely breast the frosts lingered, for she loves to be near the cold and fragrant mignonette, and with all her passionate colour she strikes no note of promise any more than of decay, only a splendid Finis to earth's well-balanced year of current life.

To spring belongs the white azalea; to summer, the dog-rose; to autumn, the dahlia (with her feet on mignonette), and to winter, what flower shall speak of Nature's hour of deep rest, when for awhile her workshop is silent, and her hand relaxed in sound slumber?

Cinders climbed awhile, then came to the woods, in whose dells and nooks lay patches of ferns, cool, green, delicious, as if summer yet lingered, mocking at the hot tints around, and bidding the onlooker prize yet a little longer her restfulness and peace.

The girl moved slowly, lingeringly; turning a loving face to theirs. She was glad that here was no holly to flout those exquisite half-tones—that here the delicate forest trees, away from the thrall of the pines, the holly, the firs, and the gorse, and no longer in a minority, could afford to be themselves, and laugh together. For, outwardly dejected, inside the rascals were putting things to rights against next spring, storing sap, arranging all their little household winter matters, sniggering delicately at those sober city gentlemen, the firs, in their new blue-green topcoats, who openly sneered at *them*.

"Aha!" they said, "just you wait; we will soon be back again to snuff you out in your old coats that will have grown dowdy and rusty—just fancy, only one for courting, and work, and everything! *We* have four—fairy green, and leaf green, and flame colour; and in winter, a glittering chain-armour of hoar-frost, the loveliest of all! *We* shut ourselves up cosily in our houses; we do no work, and scorn to stand, like you, outside in the

rain, and the wind, and the fog all the winter. When you see our tender green smoke rising from below, you will know we have wakened from our long refreshing sleep, and come back more beautiful than ever!"

In those long, long hours alone, head bent forward, foot tip-toeing towards Nature, hand to ear to listen, Cinders sometimes caught faint echoes that brought smiles of happiness to her lips, and this is what at least she *thought* she heard the forest trees whispering down in the wood.

"Scamps!" she said, and laughed, and rode on, lifting her face to a fine rain, white, microscopic, like the souls of leaves, that filtered delicately down on her as she passed below.

What were they, these minute delicate particles, shaped like the Prince of Wales's plumes, mere exhalations of the silver birch, tall, long-waisted, graceful, whose stem looks at times so startlingly, whitely, silvery bright? Or did they come as benedictions to wipe out the memory of yesterday, when their sister leaves, the last on the bough, seemed to shiver and hesitate, pointing like falling tears to the earth?

Tears! The mere thought of them dashed for a moment her holiday mood in her holiday month of the year, for if the calendar said November, this was sheer, sparkling, invigorating October. At the end of the long, long vista of green, and yellow, and brown that stretched before her, suddenly she thought of Andrew. Who that loves was ever able to see a dim avenue without longing for the *one* loved figure to close it?

For that morning, on wakening, a dangerous sense of his bodily nearness had touched her, but she had not once consciously thought of him since she started on her ride; he had slidden off with all the other worries when she raced round the Punch Bowl; but now . . .

As if for company two little meres, joined by a bridge of green, ran laughing beside the road, divided from it by trees and bracken, and with their fresh, tiny ripple gave life and movement to the scene. Sheer out of them rose a high and blackened hill that had been purple not so long ago, and at the water's edge, the vivid green of the sedges was reflected below. To the left was the wonderful wood with its almost untouched undergrowth, half summer, half early autumn, and the whole scene was beautiful as a dream that we remember after we waken.

"Now, if you had been waiting there, at that corner," said Cinders, "I might have—forgiven you."

She sighed, and turned to look down the enchanted alley, for the hour, the place, the heart and mood were all there, if the man was not, and a woman is as influenced by love's surroundings, almost as much as by love itself.

But as she alighted, and began the long three-mile ascent upwards, the sylvan beauty of the scenery vanished, and she resented having to regain the fir country, and as she climbed, her close companionship with Nature receded, her hour of pure enjoyment was over, and sad thoughts kept painful step with her. As usual, the buoyancy of spirit with which she had skimmed swallow-wise down the long hills had gone

a-missing, for as she often remarked, the wise man who had said in his folly, "Easy is the descent to Avernus," clearly had not lived in that neighbourhood, or he would have found those delightful declivities heaven, and the climb back, hell.

"There's not the least doubt about it," she said to herself confidentially, as she pushed her bike before her up the hill, "that if I lived alone in this country I couldn't do without a lover. Fancy sitting under a haystack by yourself, or looking at the moon all alone, or having the patience to walk down a long lane without expecting to see a man turn the corner of it!"

"How hot Nature's plates are!" she exclaimed presently. "She does not even stop to clear away her dirty dishes before, hey, presto! a new one is before you—it's only night's black curtain that drops between you and her surprises! And even then, if you have ears and nostrils, and sleep out in the open, she will whisper you more secrets than you can ever learn in the day."

She came presently on toadstools, vivid as jewels in their deep orange-scarlet, voluptuous, sinister, the very Cleopatras of their tribe, turning contemptuous shoulders on the brown, ugly sisters squatted about their feet. She plucked one of the beauties, and mused awhile on it. Perhaps its curling, scarlet lips made her think of that moss-cup which she had never seen, but to which Arundel had likened her mouth . . . for if a good man spots your best qualities, trust a bad one for giving a name to your personal points of beauty.

She did hope there was some original sin in Andrew . . . this toadstool, in its splendour and wickedness, was not unlike George Arundel, for if ever the gods had bestowed upon any man in fulness of inexplicable power the gift of attraction, it was George Arundel.

It seemed terrible to her that all should be right with this man save the soul within him; but his mother had begun the evil work, and afterwards he had taken his colour from the rotten conditions of society, as this fungus had from its decaying surroundings. She flung it away, breathing more freely when the moor opened out on her right, and she stooped to pluck some blaeberry leaves, brittle as glass, but gallantly and well had they done their work; all the summer they had been hustled by rude fingers for their grape-blue berries, and roughly unfruited; in autumn their leaves had been plucked for their exquisite Virginia Creeper colour; now at last they were left alone, more than a little tired, and fading to a pinched yellow. "And so good-night to you, brave little blaeberries, till next season," she said sadly.

Suddenly the ivy in flower, shoving close to the holly, and holding up her perfect little candelabras of twelve or sixteen tiny yellow globes and wicks, with which to light his scarlet (never more than sixteen lights or less than twelve, for Nature does not go awry in her counting as poor humans do), made Cinders think of church decorations; this would be the second year that she would have woven none, and Willow Grange stand empty and deserted. But prompted by Bobbie,

Celia would play the Lady Bountiful of the neighbourhood, for they were to be married before Christmas. Hating as he did all shifts, and falsity, and pose, he was going to marry Celia . . . the indignant blood rose to Cinders' brow; she had never been able to reconcile herself to the idea, could never quite forgive him, even if she suspected how the catastrophe had been brought about. And Celia would sit in the old black wainscoted dining-room at the Friary, and it gave Cinders another pang to think how the oak would set off that dazzling fairness! She herself would never have become it half so well, and there would always be a sweet pretty dollie waiting for him when he came home from hunting, and he would go to sleep after dinner, but reward it by going about everywhere with it in the spring!

She paused on the brow of the hill to look at a tree all of fretted pale lemon colour, luminous as an ivory saint in a shrine set midst the darkness of the pines, then sighed deeply. For O! the irony of it, that hating the false city life as Bobbie did, he was going to marry one of the most prominent experts of it! That *she* should have met her fate in a man whose life-work lay entirely in town! But it was all her own fault, for if she had not been flirting with Arundel, Bobbie would not have been so much thrown with Celia, and might have gone home instead of remaining to his ultimate undoing.

Worse still was her mad, unconsidered visit to Rowan . . . she shook herself impatiently; only cowards looked back, and said "We might have done thus and thus," yet

probably the issue was shaped without us, we neither let nor hindered the course of events as in our finite arrogance we supposed. And poor Bobbie would sink into degraded content, or know active misery. Which?

She thought of Elizabeth, who wanted her soul to grow (and it did); well, Bobbie's would never grow now; but then a man never wants it to, and resents being shoved on to a forced growth. Not what is good for him, but what pleases him, that will a man have. All the world over, the false, the deceitful, the wanton woman holds her sway over the souls, and hearts, and minds of men, just as she does over their bodies, their purses, and all their earthly possessions; perhaps because in nine cases out of ten, advice given by an unscrupulous woman tallies with a man's own tendencies and inclinations. And Celia was not wanton; she had not enough spirit to go on a real "bust." Whatever she did, Cinders would have to see it, for soon she must go home (if only to pacify Dinah), as the failure that she was, after the bitter experiences she had gotten, and take up her duties at Willow Grange, and she would ride to hounds again, perhaps with Bobbie, and everything would go on just the same as before this fatal visit to town . . . it might have been better to stay in the country and marry nobody.

"If I do not always keep step with my companions, it is because I hear a different drummer," said Thoreau; and Nature had set Cinders' steps to hers, and for the time at least she had the feeling that she could not share her soul, her life, with any one, not even Andrew,

and in the solitude, the heart-searching, the suffering of the past months, she had at last found herself.

"When is man strong until he feels alone?" exclaims Browning. Every soul from the beginning of time which "suffers, endures, and fulfils," sustains the question; and from Christ downwards, the only way in which our great spirit teachers have been able to preserve their finer powers intact, is to go sometimes into a desert place apart. It is the everlasting human jostling against each other, the incessant friction that wears us out, the hunting in pairs and herds that invades and desecrates the spirit solitude in which we must seek, and come to know, the God hidden within us. And mostly it is death alone that brings us to that cool and awful chamber where we stand aghast, face to face at last with what we have sedulously shunned all our lives. It is not death we shrink from, but the unknown self, in whose company we must perforce depart.

And Cinders blessed the chance afforded her to collect and establish herself in this hour of "standing in the stillness," when she was able to look impersonally at life, and realise that no matter how grave our mistakes, the soul is greater than our own petty existence.

How long ago it seemed that she had lived Celia's life, in Celia's house! When she stole away with Dinah, they had gone on a vagabond tour in the least frequented parts of the country, and the old woman stayed in quiet inns, while the girl went out for whole days

together, alternately walking and cycling, and so by degrees had worked round to her beloved Punch Bowl.

Cinders had kept away, fearing that Andrew might watch for her there, but recently she had heard that he was abroad, and the place drew her powerfully; to-day she knew that she had done well to return to it, for in that morning ride it had all fallen from her—all the shame, the ignominy, the horror of her past experiences.

And yet, Andrew had been worthy of her love, even if he had treated her cruelly, behaving as a mere man when she expected him to have the intuitions of a woman, and sometimes it struck on her that perhaps she had been just as cruel; making him suffer as severely as he had made her. For she would not explain; that had been her sole punishment of him, and a sufficient one—she would not see him, and she would not explain. It was for Arundel to do the right thing, and he had left town leaving no address; and that dastardly silence was *his* revenge on *her*.

Where was her application of her own Gospel of Love, preached so strenuously to others, that like many another preacher, at least to himself, she had stood confessed as prig and bore?

Perhaps he had been no more able to forgive her, than she him. And yet—and yet—here the corners of her mouth curved in intense mischief up—why did a maid take so much trouble to hide herself, if she did not think a determined lover were on her track?

Lucilla did not know, and Bobbie would not tell her

whereabouts, and she sighed again on Bobbie's account, and wished he were here; how he would have revelled, as Lucilla had done, in the frankness, the simplicity, and kindness of that warm little community of which Mrs. Jan Ridd was the happy mistress!

And the maids were delightful, but they *would* get married—there was something in the air, and happy as they were, they did not know when they were well off—and went. All but Lizzie, the wary, whom all men liked, and who loved no man, who had made a pattern of her life without them; and it was a good pattern, healthy and happy, and she would not let any one of them spoil it.

At the top of the hill Cinders mounted, and wondered if she could persuade Dinah to come out, but that lady thought there was far too much of the Devil about the neighbourhood, with his Bowl and his Jumps, and she carefully averted her gaze from those fascinating pictures on the wall that she considered a direct encouragement to other murderers wishing to immortalise themselves.

She was also heartily tired of what she was pleased to call Cinders' "caravan" life, and yearned for Willow Grange and her own "images" about her, and it was over these images that the two constantly disagreed.

"Is not the sky open to all? Are there not sunsets and the joy of living?" Cinders would cry in a rage. "We hang up pictures—pale, lifeless copies of the real thing: we fall down and worship the work of men's hands, and leave the glorious Book of Nature all unread, yet if we

brought all the manufactured treasures of the whole world under one roof, they would not match one corner of the earth open to the sky!"

"If you'll ask a tramp, Miss Cynthia, you'll find he prefers a water-tight roof over his head. Not but what we are next door to tramps ourselves," Dinah would reply.

But for once, she was out when Cinders returned, and as usual, the magic of the Bowl stretched out a potent hand, and seized, and drew the girl on, and up towards it, never loosing her till at the Murderer's Stone it set her face to face with a man who rose from the gorse beside it—Andrew Mackenzie.

CHAPTER XXX

"Ye say unto me, 'Life is hard to bear,' but for what purpose have ye got in the morning your pride, and in the evening your submission?"

THEY stood looking at each other silently; all the past, and all that each had made the other suffer, rushing between them.

"I have been eating blackberries," she said, and clasped her stained hands on Jack Tar's stone behind her back. Her mouth too was black, and Andrew smiled a little, it was so like Cinders, whom he had pictured in various heroic attitudes, to be found with blackberry-stained hands and lips, and the light of defiance in her glance.

She wore a coat and skirt of heather mixture, with red flecks in it that exactly matched her eyes and hair, and in her buttonhole was a late sprig of double heather, faint and pale. Her little face was clear and dazzling in its pure whites and reds after the months of outdoor solitary life, and the beauty of the close curves of her lips was not to be spoiled by mere stains of blackberries.

"Why were you not here yesterday?" she said. "We had a procession of motor-cars. I think the men must have left their ornamental wives behind, and

only brought their useful ones, for really the one or two pretty women among them looked positively immoral!"

"Why do you talk like that?" he said; "it is unworthy of you. Even Lucilla never does now."

"It was a case," said Cinders meditatively, "of the last being first—and the first last. Most of the numbers played at 'general post;' and one or two hearses frolicked in front like lambs, while some really smart ones seemed to be conducting their own funerals——"

But his hand on her arm, his eyes, stopped her.

"I have come to ask your forgiveness," he said. "Will you listen?"

She looked away over the Bowl, thoughtfully, then leaned back against the stone, and made a sign to him to go on.

"Rowan has confessed everything. She was behind a concealed door in the room that night—heard all that Arundel said—all that you did——"

"Well?"

Her eyes were cold and proud, the eyes of a stranger who only knew him well enough to express polite contempt, so he had not come here because he *believed* in her, but because a deserted lady's maid had confessed—and she felt herself harden to stone.

"You do not wish to hear?" he exclaimed.

"But I was there also," she said. "All that Rowan told you, I *know*. Why repeat it?"

The blow hit him full in the eyes, and he shrank back. She saw then how white and wasted he was,

how only the old energy of the mouth and chin remained, the man looked more broken now than when he had gone through his bad hour on the other side of the Bowl beside her.

"I have nothing to urge on my own behalf," he said.

"A word in season," said Cinders, "how good it is; but a man thinks twice before he says it—

> 'Give him a lift! Don't kneel in prayer,
> Nor moralise with his despair;
> The man is down, and his great need
> Is ready help—not prayer and creed.'"

There was a deep, burning note in her voice that matched the flint-red in her eyes which Arundel knew so well, and all the great insult he had done her womanhood came home to Andrew then, as he looked at this slim, pure girl (and fulfilled summer never yet equalled the untouched bloom and promise of spring), and who, in her moment of greatest need, had been treated by him as it would have dishonoured the worst of men to treat the worst of women. And if his wound had been deep, hers was clearly deeper. How differently worked out the charity of women to men, to that of men to women! Was it a divine, and therefore ineradicable instinct in the one, as against a corresponding total lack in the other?

"And you will never forgive me," he said.

> "Give like a Christian—speak in deeds,
> A noble life's the best of creeds:
> And he shall wear a royal crown,
> Who gives a lift when men are down."

The words dropped almost unconsciously from her lips, reproaching herself equally with him, for after all, had she not been just as quick to believe in his guilt towards Rowan? She had not given him a chance of explaining, she had flouted him, and refused to take his hand, even to wish him good-bye; it was only when he came home crippled, that she found it in her heart to be merciful to him.

"Come to the old place," he said suddenly, and Cinders went with an obvious unwillingness that would have completely taken the heart out of any man less determined, and less in love, than Andrew.

But when they came to that well-remembered spot, and in defiance of the season, sat where they had sat before, he knew that he was poorer far now, than when he was last here beside her. For Cinders was cold, cold as ice; long abstinence from love may produce as disastrous results as too much; and looking with blind eyes over the Bowl (shadow-dance, shadow-play), he knew that it was all naught to him if he had lost this girl's heart, as over yonder, by Lucilla's side, he had believed that he had lost her body.

Silent and constrained she sat beside him; they had got out of grip, out of touch (at heart, as are all who love Nature, each was a solitary soul); there was a missing word between them, and, grope as they would, neither could find it, and until they could, the text was rubbish. Perhaps if, there on the hillside, he had drawn her to him, and without a word kissed her, and

thus established warm human contact, they might have understood one another; as it was, she remained aloof, her whole nature swerving aside from the eternal serfdom, the personal espionage of love. Why could not she and Andrew just *talk*, as Adam and Eve did across the wide spaces of the Garden of Eden, before they developed that fatal habit of seeking each other's company *ad nauseam*, with such disastrous results? And bitterly Cinders felt she could easier forgive Arundel his lapse towards her, than Andrew his vile belief in her. For she had encouraged Arundel's bad opinion; all the colour and devilry of her mother's Irish blood had rushed out to meet the recklessness of his, with a joy almost impersonal, but Andrew had seen only her best side—yet he had dismissed her without the benefit of a doubt.

Alas! thought she, as chill and disheartened she sat beside Andrew, more congenial in some respects was Arundel's company—perhaps because of the fulness of life, the warm blood in him and in her . . . and outrageous as his conduct had been, a woman always secretly pardons the madness in a man that is partly of her own making.

"Let us talk it out," he said. "Did you love me then—when we last sat here together?"

"Yes. But though you had come through great things, I did not honour you till I knew the truth about Rowan."

"And now you honour, and do not love me?"

She was silent.

How the scar burned when he touched it . . .

"I did not cast you out on account of a supposed sin, as you cast out me," she said at last.

"And yet," he said, "our love *must* be real, to have survived shock, disillusion, the supposed discovery in each other of the one thing at which we both most revolted."

But still she was silent, seeming to have nothing to say. It was as if Nature had sealed her lips, and that is one of Nature's most intimate charms, that you don't need to pick and choose your words with her; you feel, and you love—but you don't talk.

Suddenly she pulled herself together, and said, with a gallant attempt at conversation, "Have you been to the Wells? Though I never saw any waggoners and their teams there! I did skirt-dances over the newts, and trembled lest I took some away. But there was one wonderful effect. A field and hillside were reflected in the water, and the effect of that green within green was mystical, remote, and you looked on faëry; each moment as the sun sank lower you knew you were losing it, but still you clung to it—if only you could have painted that."

She paused. "I do not say this in thoughtlessness," she added softly. "Shall we thrust away the dear dead joys, as some do the name that was so sweet on their lips?—shall we not be courageous, and look back, and take joy in it still?"

He touched her hand gratefully. It was the sheer humanity of her that he loved always. She would not let him feel crippled—useless, as Celia did.

"But I did not come here to talk scenery," he said.

"Then let us talk of Bobbie," she cried eagerly; "poor Bobbie! Somehow he—he makes me think of the Pascal lamb!"

The corners of her delicate mouth curled up, and with her hands in her pockets, she looked round at Andrew with a fearful joy in her eyes.

"Isn't he—enterprising?" she said.

Perhaps Andrew realised then, as Arundel had done, that humour may be the undoing of blind passion in a maiden's heart, and he shook his head in disapproval.

"Why did you put Lucilla to such anxiety?" he said.

"She has Archie. She would have tried to draw us into it—but she couldn't. She is only really alive when with him."

"But you *did* love me then," he persisted.

She nodded as at an astonishing fact.

"It seems such a long while ago," she said.

He turned quickly, and surprised in her eyes a look that he had never seen there before, but now he could understand that perhaps Arundel's revenge on her had been partly deserved, that she tempted him beyond his strength, therefore had he taken such extreme steps to break her.

"Cinders!" he exclaimed indignantly.

"My dear old mother," said Cinders reflectively, "put

on a pink ribbon for her husband when she was over sixty years old. Perhaps in that pink ribbon might be found the reason that I am a flirt—like a poet, *born*, not made, and how can I help it?"

"When you have had one or two good beatings, Cinders, perhaps you will make a good wife. But I would rather have you with all your faults, than any other woman with all the virtues!"

"Thank you, Andrew," said Cinders with spirit, "and perhaps if *you* had more faults I might like you better. Meanwhile when I am thinking of taking a master, I'll tell you."

She was warming (if only with anger) now, getting more in touch with him as a human, and turning suddenly, he took her little face in his hand, and studied it closely.

"You have at least one fault," he said, "that I cannot forgive."

She put up both hands quickly to release herself, then all at once remembered, and her fingers closed on that more or less helpless left hand of his, with a touch soft as a caress.

"If all the rest were not bad enough," he said, "I have found out that you are rich."

"I *hate* riches," exclaimed Cinders indignantly. "All the money in the world could not give me the happiness my three hours' ride gave me this morning!"

"In which you thought of me?"

She frowned, thinking that it was great good luck

he had *not* been at the bend of that wood fit for lovers' meeting (a woman has her moods even as a man), for here, with the public road behind them, she doubted even if she had ever loved him, looked at him critically, this was not the man of her imagination, she could not conjure up even a memory of those reckless moments when she longed to *kill* Arundel for intruding on her with Andrew.

She thought of it with shame, that hour of exaltation in the home, of mad licence in the streets . . . that relaxing of the bent bow, and *she* had been worse than any. Even Arundel's pulse had quickened, perhaps even his heart had softened, and he had hurried to tell her—

> "How mad, and bad, and sad it was,
> But oh! how it was sweet!"

she murmured half aloud, and sighed. How *young* she had been then!

"What was? Are you thinking of Arundel?"

She started; his voice was menacing, his grey eyes blazed, his whole body trembled, only jealousy could make a man look as black as he looked then, and his hold on the delicate chin tightened, as he tilted her face back, that he might see what her eyes hid. But finding him so very much alive, and so angry, a little tremor of fear ran through her, and Cinders, all unwilling as she was to give in, to bend the knee, suddenly drooped her long lashes that he might not see the surrender that lay beneath.

"Cinders," he cried passionately, "you loved the man?" But her eyes were quite closed now, their lids sweet as the day on which she had conjured up the Punch Bowl; yet as before they had suggested love, so now they seemed to express a weary impatience of love, and he knew that the zest of the game is gone when we doubt it, and merely to *think* that love can die, it is already dead.

She had chilled him at last, the indifferent curves of her lips might as easily have invited one lover as another, and Andrew suddenly loosed her, and turned away.

They had had no love-making, they had only loved, not enjoyed, but their love had been real, with more vitality in it than a hundred loudly expressed passions; it had survived shame, absence, neglect, yet here, in the very moment that should have brought them to each other's arms, it lay, stone dead between and dividing them, body and soul.

Then suddenly, the murder, the secret of her inveterate coldness was out.

"And pray," she said, "did you think that all this time I was with George Arundel?"

"I did," he said, and that staggered her. For a moment she winced at the sheer brutality of the thing, as Lucilla had done, not knowing how savagely he had suffered; then she said breathlessly:

"You could believe that, and *love* me?"

"I could love you," he said, "but I could not forgive you."

"And I can forgive you," she said proudly, "but I cannot love you!" which was the exact reverse of what she meant, though womanlike she said it with all the more zest.

"And yet I *did* love you, Cinders," he exclaimed; "I have loved you ever since the moment when you sat on the hearthrug in Norfolk Street, and talked to me; you stole into my heart then, and I was never able to get you out again. And when you would not wish me good-bye, that smart lasted me through the whole campaign. When I came home—" he paused, and the whole desolateness of the man's life cried out in his attitude, more desolate now than on that April morning, "you were the one thing that kept warm in me the love of life. It was because my ideal of you was so high that my disappointment was so deep. . . . Ah! but 'a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's heaven for?' It was because I loved you so much that I played the part of a jealous madman and—lost you."

She was quick now; the current of sympathy was once more established between them; and he could think of her thus—*she*, a passionate child, whom even Dinah believed to do good from impulse, and wrong of set purpose . . . yet a stubborn devil within her prompted her to say—

"Yes; you lost me."

"Little girl," said Andrew quietly, "this is sheer temper."

For a moment she quivered, raged, was on the edge of leaving him, then the hot tears sprang to her eyes; she feared to look at him, lest his mouth should be made up to whistle. And now her eyes, too, were blind, and saw not the beauty which had flooded her whole being with joy a few hours ago . . . she hated submission, and in that moment thought that she hated Andrew.

"I had better have stayed with George Arundel," she said. "He—in many respects—he suited me."

"Yes."

"He—he would have fooled round with me. You —will never learn to fool round."

"No."

She stole a glance at him. Which of them was showing temper now?

"Let us have it out," he said. "You *loved* the man?"

She was silent, as if reflecting.

"Did you not once love Celia?"

"Never; I only thought that I did."

"And may not a poor girl make a mistake too?"

"No," he said grimly. "The girl who could love George Arundel is no mate for Andrew Mackenzie. And you are telling me a lie. Yet that you could forgive the outrage he put upon you——"

"Better far than I can forgive your disloyalty to me," cried Cinders passionately, and now the hot tears rained down her face. There would always be that wound in her heart so long as life lasted. . . .

He turned, and saw those tears; it was the second time that he had seen her weep—for him—and suddenly he cried out in a great voice—

"I will not let you go—for I love you! *I love you!*"

And the masterfulness, the passion of that cry swept her out of herself, and almost to the crest of that wave of emotion in which both she and Andrew might have been carried to shipwreck or assured happiness the night of Arundel's appearance on the scene . . . yet she drew in her breath, snatching control of herself, and (so exasperating is the mind of woman) even in that moment thought how much more she could have loved him in the wood!

So when his eager lips sought hers, it was only the back of her little hand he kissed, though her eyes, into which had come a light that no other man had ever seen, ever would see, pleaded earnestly against his wrath.

"Dear," she said, and held his hand fast, "it's so long to be—be caught; let us play a bit first . . . and there is a wood . . . a wood that I know of . . . after lunch——"

"And you think I'm going to wait for a confounded wood, till after lunch?" he thundered (clearly there was plenty of original sin in Andrew); "you have never loved me—never. After all, Arundel——"

"His methods," said Cinders meditatively, "would have been all right in the Middle Ages. He always hated you so much more than he loved me."

And she sighed as she nursed his hand, that lay with ungrateful passivity, not to say aversion, between her

own. But she had long ago learnt her lesson, that a man likes to do the heroics himself, and granted he is well afire, she is wise who keeps her head, and partly from a disdainful temperament she had hitherto always amused her lovers without loving them—all but Andrew.

"Dear Andrew," she began, for his looks were dangerous.

"And why dear?" he cried in a rage (if he were ice above, he was certainly lava beneath), and released his hand to hold her at a distance; "if you must read me curtain lectures before we are married, you need not give me the chill prefix that will probably fall trippingly from your tongue in a few years' time!"

"That's just it," she said eagerly; "it's the *crowding* on each other that does it! It's that wretched army of humans pressing on our steps that destroys any original will, judgment, or aspiration there may be in our souls. And a man likes to do his work, then go out and look for something——"

"Yes?"

"Not to find *one* poor girl always at home, and I dread it so! We *mustn't* crowd. When you took my chin in your hand just now——"

"I'll take it again. It's a dear little chin, with a dimple in it."

"Only a part of one!" cried Cinders; "if it had been perfect, I'd have been a downright wicked woman! I have been fighting that half-dimple all my life!"

"Then thank God it only shows—in my hand."

"Andrew, you like to hold my chin so, and some day you will want to, and I shall not, and if you try to thrust your mood on me, I shall rebel. For I must belong to myself; there will always be one little chamber locked against you, unless—unless you have my entire honour and worship, then—then I'll trust you with the key—but you must knock, and sometimes I will let you in. Do you know that there is a real island by a real sea, where the married people are wise enough to live in separate houses, and *there* marriage is never a failure?"

"Miss Devon," said Andrew, "do you mean that you are to live at Willow Grange, and I in Town?"

"Couldn't we be engaged for a long while?" she said coaxingly, "and run up and down to see each other often."

"You are playing with me," he said, with a touch of sternness, "and worse, untrue to yourself. Either you love me, or you do not; if the former, where I am, there you will be, and in no other place. And not even to please you will I give up my profession, or live at Willow Grange, with which, nevertheless, I have fallen in love as the perfection of an English home."

She started.

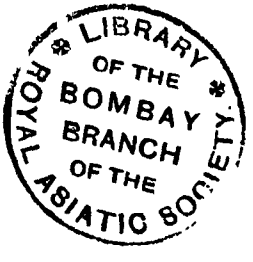
"Did you go there—before Rowan told you?"

"Months before."

She coloured with joy, and drew his hand up to her lips. Lucilla's words recurred to her: "the best part, the most vitally interesting of a man's life, is the life he leads among men," and Andrew must live his in town—yet both she and he were only happy in the country!

It was now her turn, and she took his face in her hand, and scanned the long, lean lines of it, noted remorsefully the furrows in his brow that she had planted there, and all the beauty of the man's life and heart were clear to her as at the first, when she had loved him unawares; but she sighed a little, for this was her master, and she must e'er say good-bye to her proud maiden's kingdom.

In his volunteering for the front, in his discarding of Celia, in the loss of his career, his resumption of the work that he hated, in his fight with Arundel, even in his black rage with herself, he had followed his mood all through, been natural man, and rung true as steel. While she—she who had health, youth, everything—had been hard, unforgiving; she had put him to torture by hiding herself from him . . . played capriciously with him now he was here . . . as she bowed her head, he lifted it, and there on the hillside, with all the high pomp of sky and earth, and shadow-play, and clean breath of the wind and the moor to wait upon his joy, Andrew kissed her.



Printed by BALLANTYNE, HANSON & Co.
Edinburgh & London

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on 15 October, 2018